YOUNG ADULT AUTHORS, READERS, AND FEMINIZED SOCIAL MEDIA

by

Margaret R Kohlmann

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ABSTRACT

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Margaret R Kohlmann

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This thesis looks at YA literature, a feminized genre that continues to gain momentum in publishing and popular culture. Specifically, I look at YA authors and their readers' interactions on social media and the manner in which these conversations are gendered. I argue that YA authors are expected to utilize feminized traits on social media with their readers and fellow authors, but they use same traits to create social change in the genre and industry. This project analyzes three different types of readers: Readers, Reader-Creators, and Bloggers and their interactions with YA authors on social media. My interviews with five YA authors show the impact of social media interactions on their work, which speaks to the changes in cultural production in the age of social media.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Cather Avery loves the *Simon Snow* books so much she decides to write her own story about the characters. This fan fiction stars Simon and his vampire roommate Baz, who isn't quite as big a fan of Simon as Cather is. Of course, the story Cather writes is a love story—Simon and Baz are meant to be together! Fan fiction is but one element in Rainbow Rowell's 2013 young adult (YA) novel, *Fangirl*. The novel seamlessly ties together the story of 18 year-old Cather's freshman year of college and the fan fiction about Simon and Baz that she co-writes with her sister Wren. In the novel, Rowell showcases the current status of fandom, from the fan fiction to the T-shirts and the posters. In response to the novel, Rowell's fans created their own fan fiction and fan art about Simon and Baz based on what they know from *Fangirl*. In 2015, Rowell went a step further, writing the canonical version of Simon and Baz's love story, *Carry On*. This layering and merging of mass marketed cultural texts with fan productions and practices is alive and well in the YA literature community.

Since 2012, YA literature has been on the rise. YA literature is a category of books typically aimed at readers age 13 to 18, in other words, teenagers. As more people are writing YA books and publishing houses are printing more YA books, adults have taken to reading YA, too. A Bower Market Research study conducted in 2012 found that around 55 percent of those buying YA books are adults older than 18; moreover, around 78 percent of those adults bought YA books to read themselves, not to give to a teenager. Part of this is due to the success of film franchise powerhouses like *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games.* In the same 2012 Bower Market study 30 percent of those surveyed said they were reading *The Hunger Games*.[1] The YA

[1] "New Study: 55% of YA Books Bought by Adults," *Publisher's Weekly*, September 13, 2012.

genre as a whole can be traced back to the 1940s dime novel and later the series novel, à la *Nancy Drew* or *Cherry Ames*. The 1970s were a particular "golden age" for YA literature, with novels like *Forever* by Judy Bloom and *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier. The category continued to grow thereafter, but had an especially significant resurgence in the 1990s, especially the genre of the "problem novel."[2] However, since the 1970s "golden age," the biggest period of growth for YA has been since 2012.

Data from BookStats shows the steady increase in the publication of YA novels: in 2002 the number of YA novels published was 4,668, but in 2012 that number rose to 10,276—the number of books a little more than doubling.[3] A few notable YA books came out in 2012, among them John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (hardback copies sold ~300,000)*, Insurgent* by Veronica Roth (hardback copies sold ~615,000), and, during this time frame, *The Hunger Games* continued to dominate, selling 27.7 million copies.[4] The Association of American Publishers (AAP) reports that in 2014 the children's/YA publishing industry made $4.39 billion dollars, a 20.9 percent increase from the year before.[5] Moreover, at the 2015 Children's Book Summit, Nielsen claimed US children's book sales were up 12.6 percent since January 2015, up 28 percent in Brazil, and up 10 percent in China.[6] Books like *An Ember in the Ashes* by Sabaa Tahir, *Carry On* by Rainbow Rowell*,* and *Red Queen* by Victoria Aveyard continued the YA

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[2] Michael Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010), 32.

[3] Emma Whitford and Jennifer Vineyard, "The Five: The Young-Adult Bubble," *New York Magazine*, October 6, 2013.

[4] Diane Roback, "Facts & Figures 2012: 'Hunger Games' Still Rules in Children's," *Publisher's Weekly*, March 17, 2013.

[5] Jim Milliot, "The Verdict on 2014: Sales up 4.6%," *Publisher's Weekly*, June 12, 2015.

[6] Natasha Gilmore, "Nielsen Summit Shows the Data Behind the Children's Book Boom," *Publisher's Weekly*, September 17, 2015.

success story in 2015. The latter of these books had 150,000 copies printed by HarperCollins before its release in February of that year and hit number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list the week it debuted.[7] As this data shows, the YA industry continues to gain momentum and popularity among readers. While the sales are impressive, book sales do not take into account the interactions between authors and fans, which cannot be quantified in the same way.

Many fans purchase books, but their engagement goes beyond simply buying and reading books. With social media, YA authors are a few clicks away from readers who ask questions, want clarifications, and desire encouragement. In this thesis, I identify three types of readers: (1) Reader, (2) Reader-Creator, and (3) Blogger. These types of readers work on a continuum with different levels of involvement when it comes to social media. All three types of readers interact with YA authors in different ways, but impact authors' work practice almost daily. An analysis of the interactions between these readers and YA authors connects to larger discussions of gender. How do authors interact with these readers? How do readers interact with YA authors? How might these interactions be gendered? How does femininity factor in to these conversations?

Additionally, because of the constant demand of social media, the discourse between YA authors and readers has the potential to influence the content in novels. The influence from the audience on the creator is under-explored in previous fandom research and there is plenty of room to do so. Social media affects YA authors' work practice in noticeable ways beyond their conversations with readers. How are YA authors expected to portray themselves online as authors? Who do YA authors write their books for given constant social media interaction with

[7] Shannon Maughan, "'Red Queen': A Bestseller Is Crowned," *Publisher's Weekly*, February 26, 2015.

readers? Do reader interactions impact a YA author's creative work? In what ways do YA authors listen to their readers? How might the gendered nature of YA literature lead to change in content?

By analyzing current interactions of YA authors and readers, this genre can be connected to a much wider scope of cultural studies. This female dominated genre continues to gain more popularity and attention from others outside the YA literature community, which makes it a good point of reference. My thesis analyzes an industry's cultural production and audience through the lens of the creators. Women make up the majority of authors in YA literature and they use social media in distinct ways that have not received a lot of prior focus. YA authors use their femininity in order to lift one another up and create change in their industry, but it is also this femininity that binds them in interactions with readers.

Literature Review

In this thesis, I consult past research on YA and on fandom. Discussing YA literature's history is useful to demonstrate the development of the genre and industry itself. Similarly, fandom studies provide a reference point for YA fandoms in today's internet culture and the way fans engage with each other and creators. However, it is important to note that YA literature is under-researched. Much of the scholarship about YA literature is historical rather than analytical —though some can be found in the area of girl culture studies—and fandom studies' focus has been primarily on television and movies, not books. This project aims to fill some of the gaps about YA literature and YA fandom.

Young Adult Literature

Young adult (YA) literature traces back to the Civil War in the United States. Until the 1860s there was not a lot of fiction starring teenagers, but the books written during this time were

categorized as either for boys or for girls. Arguably, novels like *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1868) are the first instance of YA literature. Later, dime novels were popular at the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th, and these books were the first form of popular literature produced for a mass audience for reading pleasure.[8] The success of the dime novel was soon capitalized on in the form of the series novel.

The Stratemeyer Literary Syndicate (SLS) publishing house was founded in 1905 by Edward Stratemeyer. The publishing house specialized in series novels that were often written by ghostwriters Stratemeyer hired to write books based on outlines he made. SLS began series novels like the Bobbsey Twins, the Rover Boys, Tom Swift, and, famously, the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew. In particular, the Nancy Drew series (1930) started because girls wanted adventure novels, too, and Stratemeyer jumped on this new marketplace for books.[9] However, Stratemeyer only developed books for girls after his books for boys were well established; American teenagers were an economic opportunity.[10] The ghostwriters allowed SLS to produce books at an extremely fast pace, like Horatio Alger, Jr.'s unfinished manuscripts.[11] Using ghostwriters for a series is not something of the past. In the same manner as Stratemeyer, contemporary media company Alloy Entertainment creates book ideas, hires writers, pitches the book series to publishing houses, and even makes artwork for the book covers. Some YA and Middle Grade (MG) book series like *Gossip Girl*, *The A-List*, *The Clique*, and *The Sisterhood of the Traveling*

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[8] Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "Dime Novels and Series Books," in *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Shelby A. Wolf, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 196.

[9] Ibid, 136.

[10] Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth Century Pop Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 30.

[11] Kent Baxter, *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 140.

Pants were all started in this way.[12]

Throughout the 1920s until the 1940s, teenage girls became recognized as part of the teenage market. High school played an important role in this development because for the first time teenagers were put together in large numbers. Teenage girls consumed clothing, make-up, music, and movies; however, few industries acknowledged girls as a viable market before World War II. Again, high school allowed a collective girl culture to develop: a shared "set of styles, practices, and behaviors, of symbols and meanings in relation to each other, to their parents, and to the larger world of consumer culture and popular culture."[13] During this time, advertisers and companies like the SLS recognized teenagers—especially teenage girls—as a new market.[14]

Because of the Great Depression, book publishing experienced a bit of a lull in the 1930s; however, series like Nancy Drew, which began during this time, sold well along with other girl mystery series novels like Judy Bolton (1932-1961), Dana Girls series (1934-1979), and Kay Tracey (1934-1942).[15] Other popular series novels aimed at girls throughout the 20th century were Anne of Green Gables, Linda Lane, girl automotive books, Girl Scout/Camp Fire Girl books, Betsy-Tacy, and Cherry Ames.[16]

In 1942 the first novel that started what would be known as YA was published: *Seventeenth Summer* by Maureen Daly, which told the story of a girl's summer after graduating

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[12] Colleen Long, "Behind the Girl-Book Craze: A Couple of 30-something Guys," *The York Dispatch*, June 30, 2005.

[13] Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture*, 1920-1945, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3.

[14] Ibid, 21.

[15] Lucy Rollin, *Twentieth-Century Teen Culture By the Decades: A Reference Guide* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 99.

[16] Sherrie A. Inness, ed., *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 201.

from high school before going to college.[17] Shortly after *Seventeenth Summer*'s publication, *Seventeen* magazine launched in 1944. The magazine's creation further demonstrates advertisers' and media companies' interest in teenagers as a relatively new and untapped marketplace. At this time, teenagers had a spending capacity of $750 million and *Seventeen* covered topics from fashion and beauty to movies and music, including many fashion advertisements for the "[adults]-in-training."[18] While *Seventeen* is a magazine, not a YA novel, it still shows the increase of media content made specifically for teenage girls where there had not been a lot previously.

Content for teenage girls continued with novels like *Going on Sixteen* by Betty Cavanna (1946) being published—another novel like Daly's that would be considered YA today. Popular novels for teenagers in the 1950s were still Daly and Cavanna's novels along with Rosamond duJardin's *Double Date* and *Wait for Marcy*, as well as *Junior Miss* by Sally Benson. Teenage boys in the 1950s enjoyed reading books about cars like *Hot Rod* (1950), *Street Rod* (1953), and *Crash Club* (1958) by Henry Gregor Felsen. Notably, *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger was published in 1951 and *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton much later in 1967; however, while the former novel starred a teenage protagonist, it had an adult target audience.[19] *The Outsiders* specifically began a thematic shift in novels written for teenagers—darker—leading into the "golden age" of YA literature.

The 1970s were the "golden age" of YA with authors like Judy Blume (*Forever*), Lois

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[17] Rollin, 142.

[18] Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Prehistory of Youth Culture 1975-1945*, (New York: Penguin, 2007), 448-449.

[19] Ibid, 190-191.

Duncan (*I Know What You Did Last Summer*), Paul Zindel (*My Darling, My Hamburger*), and Robert Cormier (*The Chocolate War*) publishing novels that are still read today. Also during this golden age, a few LGBT YA novels were published like *The Man Without a Face* by Isabel Holland (1972)—the first LGBT YA novel was *I'll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* by John Donovan (1969).[20] While these are only a few novels published in the 1970s, the "golden age" moniker sticks because many of these authors and their work remain critically acclaimed. Later in the 1980s, certain elements from much earlier in the 20th century resurfaced. Series novels were still popular, especially the newer series *Sweet Valley High* (1983), which continued until the early 2000s.[21] The 1990s saw the emergence of the "bleak book,"[22] which had dark and gritty themes, similar to the popular books from the 1970s. Both gritty and romantic themes carried on in the YA books of the early 2000s as the genre continued to develop for its teen audience.

I include this brief history because it demonstrates that YA literature has roots in other popular forms of literature and is not new. Because YA literature is under-researched, establishing its history is necessary. Advertisers and companies were not always interested in teenage girls in a market sense, though there are some exceptions, as seen with the Nancy Drew series (1930). Despite this lack of interest, YA dates back to the 1860s with authors like Louisa May Alcott. Certainly the shift after World War II shows girls as more desirable consumers, which the publications of *Seventeenth Summer* and *Seventeen* magazine illustrate well. While the

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[20] Michael Cart and Christine Jenkins, *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/ Lesbian/Queer Content 1969-2004*, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 14.

[21] Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 43.

[22] Ibid, 65.

area of YA literature made and *continues* to make a lot of money—$4.39 billion dollars in 2014 for the children's/YA publishing industry—the amount of scholarship about these books is lacking—specifically, scholarship about YA's fandom, its communities, and its authors, which this thesis aims to illuminate.

Girl Culture and Books

A well-known, psychological take on teenage girls can be found in Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia*, which examines society's impact on girls in adolescence, which often tells girls they are not worth respecting. While not about YA literature, Pipher's scholarship shows how difficult adolescence can be for girls.[23] Her findings reinforce the power YA literature can have on its audience. This notion can be seen in Janet Alsup's scholarship. In *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity Across Cultures and Classrooms*, Alsup discusses YA literature in terms of psychology and claims that readers can understand their emotions in new ways after reading.[24] She discusses the ethics and morality of teaching certain books to teenagers: will certain books make students more moral? Alsup focuses primarily on adults rather than teenagers and the way in which they engage with YA books.

Similarly, Karen Coats writes that YA literature has a powerful influence over its readers and should not be treated as "destination literature." She would agree with Alsup that YA connects to readers' emotions and helps contextualize current cultural trends. However, Coats struggles with defining YA as a genre because it is not always clear when children's literature

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[23] Mary B. Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, (New York: Putnam, 1994).

[24] Janet Alsup, *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity Across Cultures and Classrooms*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 4.

ends and YA begins.[25] This issue of distinction is what Mike Cadden contends with, too, discussing the hierarchy of literature: once readers get to the "next level," they cannot go back, e.g., an adult should read "adult" books instead of YA because they have gone on to the next level. Cadden is concerned about reading levels and is particularly disdainful of popular YA novels like *Gossip Girl,* which "[entice] young readers to wallow in unrealistic expectations about their lives as well as others."[26]

This disdain for popular YA books is not uncommon as Michael Cart does the same thing in his history of YA, calling *Gossip Girl* "privileged chick lit" and glossing over any kind of discussion about the series.[27] The dismissal of a "popular" novel like Gossip Girl on the part of both Cart and Cadden demonstrates the sexist cultural hierarchy that can be seen throughout media, especially when it is a media product made for or by women. Because many YA authors are women, the genre becomes feminized and ignored; however, there is a fair amount of scholarship on gender and sexuality in YA.

In *Reading Like a Girl*, Sara K. Day analyzes the representations of friendship and narrative intimacy in YA novels by focusing on novels with romance and friendship themes central to them. Day finds that YA novels reinforce contradictory cultural expectations about interpersonal relationships and that girls are conditioned to talk to each other in certain ways. Novels like *Ruby Oliver* (2006) by E. Lockhart highlight the "dark side" of friendship, which

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[25] Karen Coats, "Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory," in *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Shelby A. Wolf, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 315.

[26] Mike Cadden, "Genre as Nexus: The Novel for Children and Young Adult," in *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Shelby A. Wolf, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 304.

[27] Cart, 11-12.

perhaps limits what kind and how much information friends reveal to each other.[28] Also included in this discussion of narrative intimacy was the diary format, which Day argues is feminized and might imply to female readers that they too should keep a diary. Essentially, Day finds that YA novels reinforce ideas about how girls should be girls. In a similar vein, my thesis looks at YA authors and their interactions with readers on social media. When YA authors converse with readers and other industry personnel, oftentimes they are expected to embody feminized traits. The repetition of and emphasis on these feminized traits in these interactions reinforces how YA authors are supposed to be female authors.

Similarly, Beth Younger discusses the construction of female bodies in YA literature and the way in which the cultural "ideal" of a thin body is upheld. Female bodies are described more in YA literature than male ones, which Younger argues creates a culture of self-surveillance in young girls who try to fit cultural body ideals. Additionally, Younger observes that thin bodies are allowed sexual liberation while fat bodies are not.[29] Too often, fat bodies come as a cautionary tale either with the character's weight or her sexual availability—be monogamous and do not get pregnant.[30] However critical Younger may be of body image and sexuality in YA, she does believe that these novels can "expose, question, and challenge conventional ideas of female sexuality and femininity."[31]

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[28] Sara K. Day, *Reading Like a Girl: Narrative Intimacy in Contemporary American Young Adult Literature*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 4-29.

[29] Beth Younger, *Learning Curves: Body Image and Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature*, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 7-8.

[30] Ibid, 34.

[31] Ibid, xvi.

A book that does challenge traditional ideas of femininity is *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008). Tom Henthorne unpacks various aspects of this trilogy, saying it "defies genre classification." This elevation of *The Hunger Games* shows again the cultural hierarchy at work and Henthorne even claims the novel is not like *Twilight*—a novel that continues to be a good of an example of the disdain for the feminine, even within a "feminine" genre. Despite this comment, Henthorne connects Katniss's performance of gender in the novels to Judith Butler's theory on the topic. Katniss manipulates the Capitol citizens by performing femininity through fashion and her romance with Peeta Mellark. Both of these performances allow her to survive throughout the series.[32] Like Katniss, YA authors perform femininity on social media—not only with their readers, but with their industry colleagues. Not portraying the correct type of femininity could result in career and branding losses for YA authors, practices that have become embedded in authors' use of social media.

Furthermore, fashion is a point of analysis for Amy L. Montz in her article "Rebels in Dresses: Distractions of Competitive Girlhood in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction." She analyzes five dystopian YA novels and sees that fashion plays a part in the main characters' rebellion. However, fashion comes at the price of competition for a boy in many of these novels, which Montz believes pits the female protagonists against other female characters. Looking a certain way can obtain a specific result—someone becomes a winner, perhaps for a rebellion or perhaps for a boy.[33] This concept is the same for YA authors: being appropriately feminine on social

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[32] Tom Henthorne, *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary and Cultural Analysis*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., Inc, Publishers, 2012), 30-53.

[33] Amy L. Montz, "Rebels in Dresses: Distractions of Competitive Girlhood in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction," in *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*, ed. by Sara K. Day et al., (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 113.

media can result in positive responses from their readers and colleagues. By using traits that have been feminized, YA authors can build their audience and platform, but when they fail to uphold these qualities, they can receive backlash.

Much of the scholarship on YA literature takes a textual analysis approach, looking at certain books and series with a critical eye. There is not a lot of scholarship on YA that directly discusses the readers of the books, but there are a few. Tanya Erzen went to a *Twilight* convention and asked fans about the book series written by Stephenie Meyer (2005). Fans describe why they like Bella as a protagonist, finding her "normal girl" persona appealing because she "isn't your typical stupid, self-centered, vain teenage girl."[34] Erzen also takes a look at the inverted fantasies in *Twilight*: Edward as romantic and a stalker, Bella as heroic and a damsel in distress, and the Cullen family as perfect but self-obsessed.[35] The interviews with fans allow Erzen to analyze the ways in which readers engage with the text and pair that with her analysis of the text.

The same approach of talking to fans can be seen in Amy Pattee's book *Reading the Adolescent Romance: Sweet Valley High and the Popular Young Adult Romance Novel*. The book echoes Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*, which analyzes romance novels through interviews with readers.[36] Pattee looks at the *Sweet Valley High* (SVH) series under a critical lens and places it historically. Similar to Beth Younger, Pattee addresses the constructs of femininity in SVH and the way in which the Wakefield twins, Jessica and Elizabeth, uphold these cultural

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[34] Tanya Erzen, *Fanpire: The Twilight Saga and the Women Who Love It*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 4.

[35] Ibid, xvii.

[36] Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

standards.[37] Later, Pattee combines a more textual analysis of SVH with interviews with former SVH readers. She asks the SVH fans what they thought about the series when they were younger. Some fans expressed that reading SVH showed their own maturity and independence, but others were turned off by the series' portrayal of high school and the twins' "perfect bodies," finding both of these things too unrealistic.[38]

Despite the existing scholarship, there are holes in the textual analyses of YA literature, especially when it comes to race, LGBT representation, and masculinity. However, the most under-explored area is understanding the relationship between readers and authors of the YA genre. Fans are often the focus of existing scholarship and Pattee and Erzen's work has potential to be expanded more thoroughly. Interviews with YA authors, such as those in my thesis, help deepen the understanding of YA, and of the relationships between authors and reader-fans. Fans engage with media texts in various ways—a primary focus of fandom studies—but YA authors create the original text, which is why interactions between them are so important to consider.

Fandom Studies

Henry Jenkins defines the word fan as "an abbreviated form of the word 'fanatic,' which has its roots in the Latin word 'fanaticus.' In the most literal sense, 'fanaticus' simply meant 'Of or belonging to a temple, a temple servant, a devotee.'"[39] According to Jenkins, fans blur boundaries such as talking about characters as if they really exist or discussing the world of a text as a real place to explore. These fans take a media text to the next level "by translating that

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[37] Amy Pattee, *Reading the Adolescent Romance: Sweet Valley High and the Popular Young Adult Romance Novel,* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 55.

[38] Ibid, 135.

[39] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 12.

viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a 'community' of other fans who share common interests."[40]

Next level fandom is clearly visible today because fans create products on different platforms, often sharing them online with friends and strangers. Jenkins sees a difference between the *participation* of fans, for example, making artwork or writing fan fiction, and *interactivity*, or the way in which technology has been designed to be more receptive to audiences.[41] Fans interact with what Jenkins calls convergence culture, or the constant flow of content from one media platform to another. They go to different platforms for specific types of content—Twitter has a different user experience than Tumblr and what gets shared will be somewhat different. Convergence culture assists in the creation and circulation of new content, a culture that consumers and fans participate in individually and collectively.[42] Media evolution and changes in technology have the ability to reshape the ways audiences contribute.[43] This concept of media evolution easily links to convergence culture: the shift to a culture focused on consumption means companies want to know more about potential consumers. Finding out information about audiences—demographics like sex, age, income, etc.—directly connects to the desires of advertisers and marketers.[44]

However, the reliance on numerical data about audiences does not take into account fans'

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[40] Ibid, 18.

[41] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

[42] Ibid, 290.

[43] Philip M. Napoli, *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 28.

[44] Ibid, 35; 40-41.

involvement and their experience with the media text.[45] Paul Booth argues that a fan's work is never done and fan communities' work resembles "'perruque': labor undertaken and disguised as work for an employer." This concept of "perruque" essentially refers to the ways in which fans take someone else's work—a TV show, movie, book—and create their own product.[46] Booth argues that the more people who identify as fans, the more fandom can be commodified by the industry.[47] A good example of this happening is a publishing house picking up a work of popular fan fiction and publishing it, as in the way that *50 Shades of Grey* by E L James (2011) started as *Twilight* fan fiction. YA fans participate in convergence culture and perruque. Many fans read a novel (a media platform), go on social media sites like Twitter or Tumblr and talk about the book with others (a different platform, which encourages consumption of the first), and often take the novel and create a new product (artwork, photo set, etc.) or text (fan fiction, blog/review). My thesis discusses YA authors' interactions with readers as they engage in these types of fan practices. Reader-Creators find inspiration from YA authors' books, so they create media of their own, but often share it with the author, too.

While the internet helps fans connect to one another, fans have engaged with their favorite media texts for a long time. In the 1930s and 1940s, a fan club started for actress Deanna Durbin ("The Deanna Durbin Devotees") and created alternative gender identities for themselves, going against the dominant ideology of femininity at that time.[48] During

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[45] Ibid, 30.

[46] Paul Booth, *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 40.

[47] Paul Booth, *Playing Fans: Negotiating Fandom and Media in the Digital Age*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015,) 1.

[48] Georganne Scheiner, "The Deanna Durbin Devotees: Fan Clubs and Spectatorship," in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Joe Austin and Michael Willard, (New York: New York University, 1998), 88.

Beatlemania in the 1960s, crowds of female high schoolers greeted the British band in New York City.[49] As The Beatles' popularity increased, so did the number of fan publications about music, even a Beatles-centric magazine titled *The Beatles Book*.[50] This movement gave fans a sense of community, cementing friendships among many girls: "Everybody was instant friends." Listening to The Beatles empowered fans to identify not only as a group, but also as individuals.[51] In YA fandoms, there is often a collective notion of, "You read the book, you share my pain," which instantly connects fans, whether the book is happy, sad, or somewhere in between. Like music, not every fan reads a book in the same way, which maintains their individual identity and personal connection with the novel; however, because fans read the novel they foster a relationship with others.

Julie D'Acci discusses another group of female fans in *Defining Women*, which focuses on the 1980s show *Cagney and Lacey*, a program about two New York City detectives. D'Acci looks at the history of women as a desirable audience for major networks and mentions letters written by fans to the creators of the show.[52] The *Cagney and Lacey* fans wrote about the "realness" of the two characters, two working women with families, something to which these fans related. D'Acci writes that "realness" was a means for the fans to distinguish themselves from traditional standards of femininity and to work against social and cultural discourses—similar to the Deanna Durbin Devotees. The fans' advocacy for the show via the letters is

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[49] André Millard, *Beatlemania*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 121.

[50] Ibid, 124.

[51] Ibid, 135-136.

[52] Julie D'Acci, *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney & Lacey* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 177.

partially what kept *Cagney and Lacey* on air.[53] This study demonstrates the relationship between the audience and creator, which my thesis echoes. In the same way that the fans of *Cagney and Lacey* supported the show, readers support YA authors by purchasing their novels. More than buying power, YA authors and readers work off one another. When readers respond positively to something in a novel, YA authors might repeat what their audience enjoyed. Without the author, readers would have no media to consume. YA authors and readers keep one another going the same way that *Cagney and Lacey* fans kept it on air.

Another type of fan-written work is fan fiction. A simple definition of fan fiction is "a fictional writing created by the fans inspired by the objects of their interest." Types of fan fiction exist like "slash," which often pairs same-sex characters together, or cross-universe/alternate universe "AU," where characters might be put into a fantasy realm or vice versa.[54] Fans of the 1966 show *Star Trek* wrote fan magazines, which at first were mailed to other fans or sold at conventions (the first one in the 1970s). Henry Jenkins distinguishes between two types of fan-written work: the "letterzine," which published writing about the show and letters from fans—nowadays, blogs and reviews—and the "fictionzine," which published short stories, poems, and novels about characters—basically, fan fiction.[55] Today there are fewer fan magazines and more fan fiction published on places like FanFiction.net. My research identifies Reader-Creators as readers or fans of YA literature that write fan-fiction to please themselves and other fans—they

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[53] Ibid, 180.

[54] Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 170

[55] Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 42.

can remake part of a media text in their own image,[56] like "silly putty," just as Jenkins has noted of other kinds of media fans.[57]

Reader-Creators might continue a character's journey or do a "one shot," or one chapter, which could be a scene between characters that the fan wished were in the book or could feature events that had gone differently. Some fan fiction writers even do scene requests for other fans of a book or series. While it may seem like Reader-Creators only engage with one another, they also interact with YA authors. Reader-Creators may tag a specific YA author in a post after sharing artwork they created inspired by the author's book. Despite making media from an original media text, fans (Reader-Creators) still try to connect with the creators (YA authors) and share their new creation. This thesis looks at the relationship between Reader-Creators and YA authors and how it is gendered.

The engagement of fans with one another is what Nancy Baym looks at in *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*. She focuses on the ways in which the internet has changed the audience and made communities around certain soap operas more visible.[58] Again like other fans, soap fans like to personalize the show and make it meaningful to themselves. Soap fans share interpretations with other fans that they have befriended[59] and this participatory culture is able to take place because of new technology, subcultures, and economic trends that need more active viewership.[60] Essentially, fans participate in part because it is easier now with

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[56] Ibid, 55, 59.

[57] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 156.

[58] Nancy Baym, *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000), 17.

[59] Ibid, 71, 121.

[60] Jenkins, *Fans*, 136.

the internet; because they want to, and because it is financially viable for media industries if fans are vocal. If fans sit down to watch a program, the advertisers are more inclined to continue financing it because there is a large viewership.[61] This concept connects to C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby's assertion that, "fanship and fandom are shaped by the cult of celebrity and by fans' relationships with the entertainment industry."[62] In the same way, YA fans have a relationship with the industry, especially Readers, Reader-Creators, and Bloggers. Publishers sometimes send these bloggers and reviewers advanced reader copies (ARCS) or recent release in order to generate excitement and sales with followers.

The relationship between fans and the industry itself has received less academic attention, specifically the question of whether fan engagement impacts content. Melissa M. Brough and Sangita Shresthova define fan activism as "most often [associated] with active fans lobbying for a content-related outcome, such as a program staying on the air, the representation of racial or sexual minorities, or the promotion of social themes in program content."[63] Calls for representation are a point of analysis in Kathryn C. Montgomery's book *Target: Prime Time* as she traces advocacy groups' involvement with TV programs. Different racial and ethnic groups in the 1970s spoke out against their invisibility on TV shows, a conversation that continues today.[64] It can be extremely difficult for more grassroots groups or campaigns to access networks

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[61] Baym, 16.

[62] C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 5.

[63] Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova, "Fandom meets activism: Rethinking civic and political participation," *Transformative Works and Fan Activism* 10 (2012): accessed October 26, 2015, doi: 10.3983/twc.2012.0303.

[64] Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 52.

or producers when they often lack power and resources.[65]

However, some fans have had success lobbying to simply keep a TV show on air. For example, the NBC show *Chuck* was able to stay on air after a fan campaign that utilized their purchasing power in order for the network to notice them.[66] Also, the TV show *Veronica Mars*, which was cancelled in 2006, had a successful Kickstarter campaign where fans raised over $5 million for a movie, but they had no direct say in the content of it.[67] With convergence culture at a high and direct access to many creators just a click away online, the question of whether fans influence content, or how they might influence it, persists.

There have been instances of YA authors signing contracts to write a sequel because of reader demand, resulting in successful sales, as in the case of *An Ember in the Ashes* by Sabaa Tahir.[68] Tahir's readers were able to influence a publishing house to sign her on for a sequel—a unique instance of reader involvement in the production process. My thesis aims to analyze the relationship between creators and the audience and whether these interactions impact the content of YA novels. YA authors are encouraged to be online by publishers and fans, and this constant interaction has the potential to impact these authors and their work. The interactions between YA authors and readers demonstrate a strong relationship between creative producers and their audience. Their relationship also shows the pervasiveness of dominant cultural ideologies,

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[65] Ibid, 224.

[66] Christina Savage, "Chuck versus the ratings: Savvy fans and 'save our show' campaigns," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 15 (2014), accessed October 26, 2015, http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0497.

[67] Bertha Chin, et al., "*Veronica Mars* Kickstarter and crowd funding," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 15 (2014), accessed October 26, 2015, http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0519.

[68] Alexandra Alter, "Success of 'An Ember in the Ashes' Leads Publisher to a Sequel," *The New York Times*, May 17, 2015.

especially about gender. Fandom studies show what fans are capable of, but do not often include the creator and their experiences. There would not be any fandoms to study without creators like YA authors and in this social media age that connects the audience with fans more than ever, it is imperative to study this dynamic.

Method

In this thesis, I interview YA authors and look at the way in which they engage with fans and readers on social media. The interviews were done with a mix of established and debut YA authors. The two established authors are Victoria Schwab and Tessa Gratton. Schwab has published four YA, two adult, and two middle grade novels and Gratton has published nine YA novels. The debut YA authors are Emily Henry (novel out January 2016), Heidi Heilig (novel out February 2016), and Brittany Cavallaro (novel out March 2016). All three of the debut authors were interviewed in November 2015, well before the release of their books. The mix of established and debut YA authors provides more perspective and range to the project.

The interview portion of this thesis is based in grounded theory, which delineates that the theory does not lead the research, but rather, the theory emerges from the data collected. The three main research questions for these interviews were: (1) Do reader interactions influence authors' creative work? (2) What is the relationship between the author and the audience? (3) For whom do YA authors write? I asked the authors during the interviews who they write for, their relationship with their audience, what type of social media they find valuable, and what kind of feedback they have received and whether that has influenced their work. These concepts and the YA authors' answers to them, shape my analysis.

In addition to the interviews, I consult posts from social media sites like Twitter and

Tumblr from both readers and YA authors. Many of these posts are questions and comments that were sent to different YA authors from their readers and the posts act as examples to demonstrate the discourse between them. Moreover, the social media posts show the three types of readers and the gendered discourse that takes place between them and YA authors. Together the analysis of YA authors' interactions with readers with the interview portions presents a picture of YA literature that has not had a lot of scholarly focus. Both fans' and authors' experiences depend on one another—fans need the book, authors need the fans, and this relationship can be influential. The interviews give insight into YA authors' responses on social media as well as how they experience their work practice, while the posts from readers to authors are able to give more of an overview of their discourse. YA authors and readers' relationship blurs the desires of publishing with the desires of social media in a distinctly gendered dynamic.

Thesis Chapters

The second chapter identifies three different types of readers: Reader, Reader-Creator, and Blogger. I analyze the interactions YA authors have with these three types of readers and the way in which those interactions are gendered as feminine. I pinpoint certain traits that readers expect YA authors—especially female ones—to engage with on social media. Engagement with social media posts from Twitter and Tumblr shows the pushback when authors do not adhere to these feminine traits. I examine YA authors' self-surveil online in order to avoid backlash from readers, which is very similar to women's experiences in other areas of culture.

The third chapter focuses on social media as part of YA authors' new work practice and its continued gendered nature. In this section, I use the interviews with YA authors Victoria Schwab, Tessa Gratton, Emily Henry, Heidi Heilig, and Brittany Cavallaro to find out how social

media impacts their work practice. Also, I investigate whether fan interactions online impact the creators' content. I look at the YA authors' answers about who they write for, what kind of feedback they have received from readers, and whether that feedback has influenced their work. Additionally, I draw attention to "sensitivity readers," #OwnVoices, and the increase of LGBT YA novels. The presence of these concepts links in to not only YA authors' increased social responsibility online to their readers and their genre.

Finally, the fourth chapter summarizes the thesis and discuss it in a broader context. I address the limitations of my research as well as where this scholarship can continue to expand. I also discuss the cultural implications of my thesis when it comes to YA authors, readers, social media, cultural production, and femininity. To conclude, I reiterate my main points and look toward the future.

Chapter 2: Authors and their Readers

To many outside the realm of YA, the name John Green is synonymous with this particular genre of literature. This association between Green and YA makes sense, especially given that three of Green's five YA novels sit in the top 10 on *The New York Times* YA Paperback Best Sellers list.[69] According to Nielsen BookScan's Juvenile Top 20,[70] *Paper Towns* by John Green sold over 919,000 copies in 2015—not bad for a book that came out in 2008—and *Looking for Alaska* sold over 350,000 copies. Certainly the resurgence of *Paper Towns* on these best seller lists coincides with the release of the movie of the same name in July 2015; a similar pattern occurred when Green's 2012 novel *The Fault in Our Stars* went from page to screen in 2014. With over 5 million Twitter followers, ~3 million YouTube subscribers,[71] and a moniker like the "teen whisperer,"[72] it is no wonder that John Green has become a household name.

It comes as no surprise that a male author would rise to fame in a female dominated field, not when historically the feminine has been disparaged in western culture. Commercial media are often associated with the feminine; in the world of literature this means romance novels, Chick Lit, and YA. Women dominate in both writing and reading these genres, which is precisely why they have been ignored, ridiculed, and deemed "trash" throughout the years by both men and women. One look at the March 2016 *New York Times* YA Hardcover Best Seller list shows

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[69] "Young Adult Paperback," *The New York Times*, March 6, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2016/03/06/young-adult-paperback/.

[70] This list compiles picture books, middle grade novels, and YA novels.

[71] These numbers are as of March 2016.

[72] Margaret Talbot, "The Teen Whisperer: How the author of 'The Fault in Our Stars' built an ardent army of fans," *The New Yorker*, June 9, 2014.

women at the forefront of YA: eight of the ten novels are written by women.[73] Within the YA literature community, authors like Victoria Aveyard, Leigh Bardugo, and Rainbow Rowell (all on the Best Sellers list) are familiar, if not well-known, names; however, these authors quickly become overshadowed when compared to John Green's massive media presence—all three female authors' Twitter followers add up to 3.6 percent of Green's followers. In fact, across the paperback, hardback, and e-book NYT best sellers lists in March 2016, the Twitter followers for the nine women included make up just 9.3 percent of Green's follower numbers.[74]

While John Green might be considered an outlier due to his YouTube presence in addition to his novel writing, he still remains the most familiar beacon of the YA genre, especially to people less familiar with the community. The only authors who potentially rival John Green's beacon status are Stephenie Meyer and/or Suzanne Collins, neither of whom use social media. Author Lauren Morrill writes, "Women writers are always getting called 'the next [INSERT DUDE WRITER NAME]." She also comments, "The next Hunger Games/Harry Potter/ Divergent/Twilight vs. The next John Green/Neil Gaiman/etc. Heaven forbid you be the next JK Rowling."[75] To readers and critics outside the YA literature community, male authors like Green become the "saviours"[76] of the genre who write worthwhile books compared to what is already

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[73] "Young Adult Hardcover," *The New York Times*, March 6, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2016/03/06/young-adult-hardcover/.

[74] As of the March 6, 2016 NYT list and the Twitter followers at the same time. The authors counted are: Victoria Aveyard, Ruta Sepetys, Kiera Cass, Alexandra Bracken, Leigh Bardugo, Rainbow Rowell, Gayle Forman, Jenny Han, and Gena Showalter. It is worth noting that the best seller list constantly shifts; however, no lone female YA author begins to match the number of John Green's followers except J.K. Rowling whose *Harry Potter* books are not always considered YA.

[75] Lauren Morrill, Twitter post, February 21, 2016, 1:06 p.m., https://twitter.com/LaurenEMorrill/status/701483118390353920.

[76] Nudrat Kamal, "Sexism in Literature," *Tribune*, March 23, 2015, http://tribune.com.pk/story/855855/sexism-in-literature/.

published. The term savior clearly implies that YA literature needs significant help, as if female authors and their books are damsels in distress—all that they need is male authors to give the genre legitimacy and save it from the dragon. After all, Green is "a writer, and his books are not about sexy vampires."[77]

While sexism certainly exists in publishing, literary communities, and across contemporary culture, the YA genre and community marks itself as feminine beyond who writes the majority of novels. The discourse within the YA literature community between authors and readers is gendered and the conversations exist alongside and through gender, not outside of it. In online exchanges, the questions from fans and the responses from authors construct the YA literature community as distinctly feminine, as expressed through a reliance on discourses of emotion, sensitivity, and nurturance, conventionally feminized traits. This observation means not to further disparage femininity, but rather to observe the way in which authors and readers engage with one another and how gender factors into those interactions on social media. What do fans ask? How do authors respond? How do fans expect YA authors to act online? What happens when authors do not meet those expectations from fans?

In order to analyze these discourses, three types of readers will be analyzed: (1) the Reader, the base level of a fan who asks YA authors questions, follows them on social media, and reads books; (2) the Reader-Creator, a more involved fan who writes fan fiction, makes GIF and/or photosets, and even analyzes the text for themselves and other fans; and (3) the Blogger, a distinct type of Reader-Creator who reviews books and engages with YA authors on social media, typically as friends. Interviews with three YA authors—Heidi Heilig, Brittany Cavallaro,

[77] Talbot, "The Teen Whisperer."

and Emily Henry—will be used to deepen the analysis. Individual fans can move between all three types of reader, but different permutations of feminized discourse happen at each level of fan involvement. Conversations between YA authors and fans occur primarily on social media sites like Twitter and Tumblr because they make YA authors easily accessible. Even though the conversations vary between types of readers, together they still communicate that the space of YA, and the work of the YA author, is gendered as feminine.

In this space, fans and authors celebrate one another, but when female authors do not interact in distinctly feminine ways, some fans criticize them and try to police the authors' responses. Tension exists between authors and readers over what each considers to be a positive interaction. YA literature praises femininity through its encouragement of female authors, its call for complex female characters, and its focus on female centered friendships. Despite this celebration, YA authors' and readers' interactions speak to a larger trend in culture that encourages women and girls to self-surveil and police their actions in order to fit a cultural standard of femininity that is kind, giving, and nurturing. These standards leave no room for female YA authors to be anything but these feminized characteristics, and if they fail to police their own actions, readers will do it for them. A discussion of YA authors' social media work practice and how readers affect it occurs in chapter three.

Readers

On a simplistic level, Readers are people who read: they purchase or borrow a novel and the world of that novel absorbs them for a few hours of their day. For many readers, however, books are more than the act of reading, especially now that their favorite authors are easily accessible online. Now Readers can ask questions and talk with these authors—about characters,

about craft—and they do. Platforms like Twitter and Tumblr are the primary location of these interactions, most likely because these are where fandoms thrive and where answers are a click away. YA authors Brittany Cavallaro, Emily Henry, and Heidi Heilig describe these interactions:

> **Cavallaro**: I had a reader send me fan-art of my characters… And nice emails from fans, but largely that interaction has been over Twitter, which has been really cool.
>
> **Henry**: It's very strange because I feel immediately like these people [YA Bloggers] are my friends. (laughs)
>
> **Heilig**: It's kinda like, you can have more normal conversations and then you know, sometimes people will reach out to you and say, "Oh, I'm really excited about your book," and you can just say, "Thanks."

As these accounts from these YA authors show, engagement with Readers happens quite often on Twitter, which in particular elicits fast responses; conversations happen in a matter of moments. The fan artwork Cavallaro received on Twitter came before her novel, *A Study in Charlotte*, was released. The conversations YA authors have with Readers are not always about a novel, as Henry and Heilig mention, and if they do talk about a novel, it might not be their own. When authors tweet about their day, a work in progress, or even a television show, Readers might want to weigh in and discuss. Casual chats with Readers surely occur, but commonly Readers want to know more about a novel or tell the author how much the book meant to them.

Take for example Leigh Bardugo, author of The Grisha Trilogy—a magical, high fantasy series—and some of her interactions with Readers on her Tumblr:

> **craftysquidz**: Hello! What first gave you the idea to make the Darkling not only the villain, but a love interest as well?[78]
> **Bardugo**: That's a tough question because I don't think I build stories that way. I don't set out to write heroes or villains or love interests, just characters with their own histories and their own desires. My good guys sometimes do horrible things. My bad guys

[78] All posts from social media will be written as they originally appeared.

sometimes do kind things. Sometimes they get their hearts broken. Sometimes they get it on.[79]

Anonymous: How come the Darkling doesn't realize he's surrounded by Grisha aboard Stormhund's ship? Do amplifiers have to literally touch other people in order to know if they are Grisha?
Bardugo: Yes. And skin to skin touch is also how Grisha identify human amplifiers.[80]

Both of these messages show the first type of Reader interaction, asking a question about the novel and sometimes the craft behind it. These are questions Bardugo does not have to answer—the second question is explicitly answered in the novels—but she does anyway. She acknowledges her Readers' emotional investment in this world and gives back to them by answering these types of questions. These interactions suggest that Bardugo cares about her readers deeply and that no question is bad, even if its answer is addressed in the novels. Answering questions like Bardugo does for Readers is extra, emotional work, even if a question is technical or craft based.

Another author who takes time to answer questions about her novels is Maggie Stiefvater, author of The Raven Cycle series:

fuckinqsharks: This isn't too important but how tall do you envision blue[81] to be? I know she is short compared to the boys but it'd be nice to know for the purpose of plain curiosity
Stiefvater: Dear fuckinqsharks, After reading the Raven Cycle, readers often ask me how it is that three people manage to fit in the back of a '73 Camaro. This is possible because Blue is the size of a deck of playing cards (but is far less easily shuffled). Obviously this leaves plenty of room for two other teenagers. I hope this helps. urs, Stiefvater[82]

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[79] Leigh Bardugo, "Leigh Bardugo," Tumblr, February 3, 2015, http://lbardugo.tumblr.com/post/109962695800/hello-what-first-gave-you-the-idea-to-make-the.

[80] Leigh Bardugo, "Leigh Bardugo," Tumblr, March 24, 2014, http://lbardugo.tumblr.com/post/80595067652/how-come-the-darkling-doesnt-realize-hes.

[81] This is a character's proper name.

[82] Maggie Stiefvater, "Contents of Maggie Stiefvater's Brain," Tumblr, March 4, 2016, http://maggie-stiefvater.tumblr.com/post/140461075571/this-isnt-too-important-but-how-tall-do-you.

> **fandork**: What are the Aglionby colors? (If I missed that information in the books, I'm very sorry!)
> **Stiefvater**: It's no problem! Their colors are money and resentment, with a thin pin-striping of entitlement on most garments. urs, Stiefvater[83]

Here Stiefvater answers her Readers facetiously, and notably does not actually answer the questions asked by them. Her use of humor to deflect the questions might seem dissimilar from Bardugo's answers, but all that differs is the tone. Stiefvater still answers the questions from her Readers; whether her answers are too curt is a matter of opinion. She engages with her Readers in a distinctly Stiefvater way, which might make readers laugh or frustrate them. However, it seems that Stiefvater cares for her readers, despite her sometimes flippant tone, as can be seen in this response after a Tumblr user read *The Raven King*:

> **quaillord**: YOU MAGNIFICENT SON OF A BITCH. Thank you. It was beautiful. It was a gift.
> **Stiefvater**: My entire inbox is a delight right now. All of you: You're welcome, and thanks.[84]

Stiefvater thanks all of her readers for engaging with her novel, something that she needs in order to be an author. Both Stievater and Bardugo seem to really care about their readers, otherwise neither author would answer their questions at all.

The second most prominent type of interaction is Readers sending the author a message about how much a book meant to them. This type of interaction can be seen with Renee Ahdieh, author of *The Wrath and The Dawn*—a reimagined telling of Arabian Nights—and a message she received on Tumblr:

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[83] Maggie Stiefvater, "Contents of Maggie Stiefvater's Brain," Tumblr, February 5, 2016, http://maggie-stiefvater.tumblr.com/post/138757130731/what-are-the-aglionby-colors-if-i-missed-that.

[84] Maggie Stiefvater, "Contents of Maggie Stiefvater's Brain," Tumblr, April 27, 2016, http://maggie-stiefvater.tumblr.com/post/143484031436/you-magnificent-son-of-a-bitch-thank-you-it-was.

> **Anonymous**: Firstly, I absolutely loved The Wrath and The Dawn, it was amazing one of the best books I've read to date, I absolutely cannot wait until The Rose and The Dagger comes out! Secondly, the short story from Khalid's perspective just made my entire weekend! You have so much talent, this series is just amazing thankyou so much for writing it.
> **Ahdieh**: You are too kind! Thank you so much ❤️[85]

Julie Murphy, YA author of *Dumplin'*—a novel about a fat girl who enters a beauty pageant—got a similar message on her Tumblr:

> **hisamericangirlfriend**: Hi Julie, I never usually talk to authors but i just had to tell you that i finished Dumplin today and it was truly awe-inspiring. So many things that Willowdean said or felt is just how i feel and your book (character) taught me how to love myself just a little bit. So many of my own issues came up and i just want to thank you for writing a powerful novel. I love you and Willowdean an awful lot. Sabah xoxo
> **Murphy**: Thank you so much. I needed to read this message today. ❤️❤️❤️[86]

Both of these responses from Ahdieh and Murphy are gracious as they thank the readers for their kind words about their novels. Like Bardugo and Stiefvater, Ahdieh and Murphy do not need to respond to these messages. There might be pressure from publishers to be present and active, but that does not necessarily equate to interacting with readers—it could be helping their book's marketing campaign in a different way. For example, *Entertainment Weekly* shared the first chapter online from Emily Henry's *The Love That Split the World*[87] and a thirteen chapter sneak peek of Laini Taylor's *Strange the Dreamer* was given out at Book Expo America and BookCon,

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[85] Renee Ahdieh, "Renee Ahdieh," Tumblr, February 21, 2016, http://rahdieh.tumblr.com/post/139748669295/firstly-i-absolutely-loved-the-wrath-and-the.

[86] Julie Murphy, "and i'm julie," Tumblr, March 1, 2016, http://andimjulie.tumblr.com/post/140313755642/hi-julie-i-never-usually-talk-to-authors-but-i.

[87] Isabella Biedenharn, "Read the first two chapters from *The Love That Split the World*—exclusive," *Entertainment Weekly*, November 18, 2015, http://www.ew.com/article/2015/11/18/love-split-world-excerpt-emily-henry.

part of a "six-figure national marketing campaign."[88] Both of these marketing examples have less interaction with fans; however, interacting is an extra layer that authors have added to their job and it has obvious benefits on the business side.

Ahdieh and Murphy take in the readers' emotional responses—excitement and inspiration respectively—and reply politely and sensitively, validating the readers' feelings. They provide just the right amount of engagement for the type of message they were sent. As Heilig said, sometimes "you can just say, 'Thanks,'" which Ahdieh and Murphy do, but they also sign their answers with hearts—with love. Signing letters with love is typically something that might be done when ending a letter/text/email to a friend or family member. Ending a response to a reader with a heart relates back to Henry's comment about feeling like readers are her friends. Henry feels an instant emotional connection with Readers, whether they have read her book or someone else's.

The other authors carry out a similar dynamic. If they do not have full friendships with their Readers, they certainly have potential ones. They craft a positive interaction, which not only encourages Readers to ask more questions in the future, but encourages Readers to continue being fans of their books. After YA authors write books, Readers seem to expect the authors to field their varied emotional responses on social media and respond using conventionalized feminine traits. Responding to a Reader with kindness and affection—traits that Readers admire in these YA authors—becomes part of the extra emotional work authors do online. This emotional work, and the feminine traits that are necessary to complete it, get placed upon the YA authors by Readers at least in part because of the authors' gender and the cultural assumptions

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[88] Laini Taylor, *Strange the Dreamer*, Preprint, (New York: Little, Brown, 2016), 1-119.

that go along with it. Culture teaches women to be polite, kind, and considerate—putting others first is essential, and the cultural figure who encompasses these traits best is a mother. More about how YA authors "should" act on social media is addressed in chapter three.

At times, Readers address female YA authors as "Mom," which connects to this friendly, familial connection they make with Readers. It is worth noting that "mom" has different potential uses on social media. Some readers may use "mom" as a joke, merely because it is new internet slang, or because it denotes a specific level of admiration and love. Regardless of these variations, when Readers call an author "mom," the term hinges on the author's age as well as her gender. As older women—not teenagers—these YA authors become wise figures to younger readers merely based on their age and adult status. Like children might ask their mothers how to do a task or ask for advice, Readers ask the same thing of female YA authors and some even see themselves as children of authors:

> **thatwasleslie**: Do you pretend to have more children?
> **Stiefvater**: Dear thatwasleslie, No, but a lot of Tumblr calls me Mom so it's like I have thousands more than I legally claim as dependents anyway. urs, Stiefvater

The association with motherhood makes YA authors' emotional labor extremely specific: culture expects mothers to be constantly giving, loving, and supporting their children's pursuits. Thus, the expectation is that YA authors should treat Readers in the same way. Courtney Summers, author of YA novels like *All the Rage* and *This is Not a Test*, comments on the "mom" phenomenon, "I guess I'll know I've arrived when complete strangers start calling me MOM in my mentions? I DON'T LIKE THESE NEW PARAMETERS FOR SUCCESS."[89] While Summers' tweet is funny, she seems to struggle with the idea of being the mother of complete

[89] Courtney Summers, Twitter post, March 19, 2016, 8:34 p.m., https://twitter.com/courtney_s/status/711365166743601154.

strangers, even if they are her Readers. Being a mother or parent in general comes with a lot of work, work that YA authors might not want to be forced into by Readers or by publishers. Referring to Summers as "mom" takes away from her the decision of whether she wants to be a mom-like figure at all. This hesitation from Summers is a different take on the concept than that of author Heidi Heilig, who has referred to herself as mom on Twitter. In a thread she assures her readers that they do not need to defend her from bigots and racists, that the "kids" do not need to protect the "parent":

> **Heilig**: Your job is to keep being awesome you and to be safe and be excellent :) I know i invite everyone to punch bigots but it's not the same :)/Anyway i love you guise and long story short, take care of yourselves please because you're important to me :) <3 <3 <3/—signed, your ONLINE AUTHOR MOM. (ps eat your beans)[90]

Calling oneself or being called "mom" implies a certain kind of relationship—ideally one that is loving, nurturing, and caring. Placing this type of relationship on an author further blurs the line of reader/author and changes the expectations from readers about their interactions with authors. "Mom" implies that readers want to have certain kinds of interactions with authors: fun, loving, and insightful. Many readers ask authors advice, not just about writing, but about their lives—where they should go to college,[91] what to do about depression,[92] and how to get through high school.[93] These questions are things readers should perhaps ask a parental or adult figure they trust in their lives. Instead, the readers ask these YA authors questions, turning them into

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[90] Heidi Heilig, Twitter post, February 19, 2016, 7:20 p.m., https://twitter.com/heidiheilig/status/700852455895076864.

[91] Leigh Bardugo, "Leigh Bardugo," Tumblr, January 18, 2015, http://lbardugo.tumblr.com/post/108526840350/hi-leigh-i-know-youre-busy-with-six-of-crows.

[92] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, March 16, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/141152760540/how-could-i-get-over-depression-to-be-quite.

[93] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, March 20, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/141408021090/i-love-reading-with-all-of-my-heart-but-i.

surrogate moms who are preferable to any real life authority figures. Perhaps Readers turn to authors because the content of the novel resonates with them and they might not feel comfortable discussing it with their own authority figures. Because the author wrote the book, Readers assume that authors understand a topic well, no matter what it might be. YA authors then become a safe space to dissect topics and have conversations they might not have elsewhere in their lives. However, with authors responding to readers like friends or their children, it comes as no surprise that when authors do not match that polite, sensitive rhetoric, there is some pushback against them.

One author who makes herself readily available to her Readers and has garnered some pushback is Victoria Aveyard, author of the YA novels *Red Queen* and *Glass Sword* (the second book in the planned four book series.) The dystopian fantasy novels follow Mare Barrow, a seventeen-year-old girl who lives in a futuristic North America and has lightning powers. The first book, *Red Queen*, hit number one on the *New York Times* Best Sellers' list the day it came out. Since the first book's release, Aveyard talks to her readers regularly on social media, mostly on Tumblr and Twitter, like other authors. A Twitter chat hosted by the *Guardian* Children's book team about Teen Fantasy novels shows different types of questions readers ask Aveyard:

> **@shinichimeguimi1**: What are your standards when it comes to picking the most perfect book cover for your books?
> **Aveyard**: Just my personal taste. I like simple, symbolic covers. @stinkysarahd makes them art.[94]
>
> **@LHS_English**: Are you under pressure to create series or trilogies or are the worlds & stories so large they can't be contained in one bk?

[94] Victoria Aveyard, Twitter post, February 28, 2016, 11:51 a.m., https://twitter.com/VictoriaAveyard/status/704000971530055680.

Aveyard: No, I gravitate towards this myself b/c I'm a greedy reader/writer.[95]

@readingthatbook: Is it hard for you to kill certain characters? (Please without spoilers🙈)
Aveyard: No.[96]

@DessaCarstairs: what's your favorite food?
Aveyard: Pizza.[97]

As with the other YA authors, readers ask Aveyard about her novels, the craft of writing, and even her personal life. They even refer to the author, who is in her mid-twenties, as "Mom":

wendy-birddd: Hey mom hope you are having a great day.
Aveyard: Thank you![98]

tmblrzz: Do you have a playlist for glass sword, mom?
Aveyard: Yup, on my spotify![99]

Aveyard answers questions similarly to Bardugo: straight, to the point. However, often her tone and curtness garner criticism from readers. One message from an anonymous reader illustrates this dissatisfaction with Aveyard's personality and tone on her Tumblr:

Anonymous: I finished RQ! It was alright, entertaining enough despite the millions of cliches ripped straight from [The Hunger Games] and [A Song of Ice and Fire]. Now I just spent an hour going back in time reading all your your posts. I conclude that you are an arrogant, obnoxious, egotistical self-absorbed maniac. The whole race thing is ridiculous. It is extremely offensive the way you handled it. Though you can be

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[95] Victoria Aveyard, Twitter post, February 28, 2016, 11:47 a.m., https://twitter.com/VictoriaAveyard/status/704000033511714816.

[96] Victoria Aveyard, Twitter post, February 28, 2016, 11:46 a.m., https://twitter.com/VictoriaAveyard/status/703999643412074496.

[97] Victoria Aveyard, Twitter post, February 28, 2016, 11:53 a.m., https://twitter.com/VictoriaAveyard/status/704001612398723072.

[98] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, March 22, 2015, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/141494327055/hey-mom-hope-you-are-having-a-great-day.

[99] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, January 14, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/137301585685/do-you-have-a-playlist-for-glass-sword-mom.

> charming, it comes off as insincere and conceded. You are ridiculous and I will not buy your next book.
> **Aveyard**: Thank you for calling me charming! It's spelled 'conceited' by the way! Can't wait to see everyone in Cebu tomorrow and Manila the day after! So far my book tour in the Philippines has been an absolute blast! Thank you for wanting me to come visit! All my love to my wonderful readers here![100]

Clearly, Aveyard's blunt and sarcastic answers rub certain readers the wrong way. By being curt, Aveyard seems less mom-like, less emotionally invested in her readers—"Is it hard for you to kill certain characters?" "No." It is this seeming lack of emotional sensitivity that brings about messages like this anonymous one. The implication that Aveyard must be emotionally sensitive to her Readers is an indicator of the expectations of conventional femininity in these interactions. Readers assume that because Aveyard is a woman, she must be compassionate both in her writing and in responses. If Aveyard is not compassionate in either scenario, the Readers take notice and try to police her actions. Readers attempt to change Aveyard's behavior to be more empathetic to Readers and to her own characters, such as wanting her to feel bad for killing off a character. They want her to be more like the culturally conceptualized version of femininity than she currently embodies—she should be, and want to be, more mom-like. These expectations box Aveyard in and she event tells a Reader, "I do my best to come off as outgoing, fun, and extroverted in my career persona, but I'm introverted."[101] Readers push Aveyard to deviate from her true personality and embody a more bubbly, feminine one, a process that reproduces itself in other areas of culture, not just YA literature. Chapter three shows that it is not only readers that want YA authors to embody these traits, but the industry, too.

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[100] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, March 4, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/140437369010/i-finished-rq-it-was-alright-entertaining-enough.

[101] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, June 6, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/145494515745/its-absolutely-fair-to-be-uncomfortable-with-a.

Furthermore, Aveyard finds herself in another double bind. While some readers see her as rude for a female author, others criticize her based on the femininity of her characters. One reader writes to Aveyard, "Did you really intend to friendzone Kilorn?" The term "friendzone" refers to someone rejecting the romantic or sexual advances of someone else, seeing that person as just a friend. Typically, a phrase like, "she friendzoned me" is not a positive statement about the relationship or the person who did the rejecting. It places the blame on the rejector and indeed blames that person for not liking the other romantically. In the case of Kilorn, the best friend of *Red Queen*'s main character, Mare, Aveyard gets blamed for her main character not seeing him in a romantic light—a very meta-textual condemnation. Where in a real world "friendzone" situation, the girl would be criticized for not giving the boy a chance, Aveyard takes the girl's place—Mare's place. Readers blame Aveyard for Mare rejecting Kilorn and subsequently complain about it to her: "Am I supposed to think that kilorn doesn't have a chance anymore?"[102] They want Aveyard to change her mind and have Mare see Kilorn in a romantic light, exactly how people might encourage a girl to give a boy she has no interest in a chance —"Be nice, give him a chance! It took a lot of courage to ask you out!"

Beyond questioning decisions in the books, readers question Aveyard's unusual journey to becoming a published author, which gets used to try and diminish her accomplishments. Aveyard was a screenwriting student at the University of Southern California when she began to write *Red Queen* and was able to find connections to New Leaf Literary, a literary agency, through her script manager. Eventually, her current literary agent Suzie Townsend chose to pick up the novel. Traditionally, YA authors must query agents—send a one page letter describing the

[102] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, June 6, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/145511979105/am-i-supposed-to-think-that-kilorn-doesnt-have-a.

novel—and often get rejected countless times before an agent wants to sign the author. Aveyard skipped much of this process, which has made a few readers/aspiring-authors frustrated:

> **Anonymous**: I feel you shouldn't give people advice on how to best go about getting published, especially with casually mentioning they need to get an agent. If that were so easy, everyone would be repped and have deals. You didn't query, you didn't receive hundreds of cold rejections, and good for you that you didn't have to. It's gut wrenching, to say the least. You're the lucky exception, to bypass all those milestones. Direct them to people who have been in their shoes before, which isn't you.[103]

Additionally, Aveyard received an open, anonymous letter from a published author—made clear through the letter's wording—which shows how her untraditional route to publishing builds resentment. Part of the letter reads:

> **Anonymous**: First, congratulations on your success. I'm sure you worked hard and deserve every bit of it. But I do want to say you're rubbing a lot of people in the YA community the wrong way (i.e., authors). I'm sure some of it is jealousy, which is their problem not yours. But coming from a traditionally published YA author, it does hurt when you say things like "I wanted to write the next big YA novel." It comes off as you prioritizing your own money, fame, and movie deal over stories for teens. Maybe that's not how you meant it, and it was simply a poorly worded statement. Or maybe you did mean it exactly that way and don't care what anyone else thinks.[104]

Apparently, Aveyard must work hard, but do it for the "right reasons," which means being selfless and thinking of the readers first. Wanting to be successful for monetary reasons—a motivation this anonymous author is putting in Aveyard's mouth—is unacceptable. Authors must put the art first and the money second even though writing is a job. This attitude is very akin to the notion that mothers need to put their family first before themselves. Mothers must be selfless and focus on the achievements of their children before they pursue anything in self-interest. Employment and any achievements become seen as selfish and at the family's expense: how will

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[103] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, March 13, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/140951725830/i-feel-you-shouldnt-give-people-advice-on-how-to.

[104] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, March 5, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/140534583155/support-and-representation.

the children grow up with a neglectful, self-seeking mother? Aveyard simply cannot win: she is allegedly too ambitious and too sarcastic a writer and internet persona. Her femininity continues to be policed by Readers for not fitting the cultural standard. Aveyard must change her ways in order to be more of a mom-like figure, to embody the "correct" type of femininity.

Certainly, Aveyard has fans who appreciate her sense of humor and writing; however, the messages that push back against her tone highlight her deviation from the usual caring, sensitive tone of other female YA authors. These interactions are gendered in this way, which is not to say that Aveyard or another YA author should employ a conventionally feminine tone. The insinuation that YA authors should act as ideal mothers to readers is a product of assumptions about appropriate gender traits, whether the authors conform to the expectations or not, as in the case of Aveyard. In the digital age, YA authors and Readers connect in various ways in multiple places, but these interactions come packaged in a feminized double bind—any response from an author could be construed as negative. YA authors become YA moms and they have to decide whether they will be strict, lenient, or "fun" parental figures online. Readers' desire for connection with YA authors they admire is understandable. Yet, when culture sets up certain expectations for women and femininity, these ideologies find their way into feminized spaces like YA literature and, as seen with Aveyard, there is pushback when YA authors do not fit the feminine cultural standard.

Reader-Creators

Whereas readers read novels and ask YA authors questions, Reader-Creators do the same, but go a step further. Reader-Creators make their own content based on a novel or series by a YA author. This creation includes, but is not limited to, their own writing (fan-fiction), GIF or photo

sets, artwork, videos, and text posts—these range from diary-like posts and analyses to parodies and more. These fans produce these cultural products simply because they want to continue engaging with the novel and its world. Readers may share a GIF set or read a fan-fiction story; however, they are not the original creator, the one who made the new content. This distinction between Readers and Reader-Creators is a blurry one—they can at any time move between these two arenas. Fandom studies scholar Henry Jenkins observes the way in which fans transform their experience with a media text "into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a 'community' of other fans who share common interests."[105] Where Readers consume a book, Reader-Creators do the same but go a step further to do their own cultural production based on a novel. Reader-Creators mold a book to their will and whim, similar to how someone plays with "silly putty."[106]

When Reader-Creators make their new content, it occurs in tandem with the novel. The author does not have an active role in the production of a fan-fiction—and many do not read it for copyright purposes—a GIF set, or a piece of art. Like Readers, Reader-Creators have a relationship with the author whose work inspires their fan-made content. The YA authors reaffirm the Reader-Creators and their content mostly through sharing the Reader-Creators' posts (artwork, GIF/photo sets, etc.) Also, YA authors sometimes comment on an analysis, or respond to a specific in-depth query from a fan who wants to know a little more than what someone's name is on page 56. Analysis encourages the creation of new concepts, new connections, and new conversations between readers. Some YA authors also act as Reader-Creators themselves.

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[105] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 18.

[106] Ibid, 156.

For example, Heidi Heilig puts together outfits based on YA book covers.[107] Heilig even has her own secret Pinterest board based on her novel, which features large pirate ships, beautiful islands, a telescope and compass, a young bearded man, and another man twirling fire.[108]

A good example of a YA author responding to an in-depth question from a Reader-Creator comes from Maggie Stiefvater. A reader asks about *Blue Lily, Lily Blue*, the third book in The Raven Cycle series:

> **wolfwings7**: Chapter 31 (the church scene) of BLLB ends with Ronan being very angry. Why? This scene really bothers me, like I'm missing something important he could be angry just because, but I don't think so. It's like this time, he's actually really hurt. Did the dream upset him? He almost seems ashamed (?), but I can't for the life of me figure out why. Or maybe I'm reading too much into it and he's upset because he's Ronan Lynch. What do I know? He challenges us all to learn him again :) Thanks, Kat

On one hand, this question is very analytical, and might be something a student would ask in a literature class as it tries to dig into a specific character. What is the significance of this character's anger at this particular moment? On the other hand, this question immediately deals with emotions, a feminine realm of conversation. Where women often are seen as transparently emotional, here a female YA author has written a character with ambiguous, complex anger, which may become clearer after another read-through of the book. Stiefvater's characterization of Ronan Lynch complicates both the gendered area of YA literature as well as author-reader interactions. In response to the question, Stiefvater breaks down the scene for Kat, at length, in her own authorial interpretation, but "the short answer to this is *he thought he didn't have to feel*

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[107] Heidi Heilig, Twitter post, April 5, 2016, 8:21 p.m., https://twitter.com/heidiheilig/status/717522552055283712.

[108] Heidi Heilig, Twitter post, January 29, 2016, 8:30 a.m., https://twitter.com/heidiheilig/status/693078876830986240.

that way anymore."[109] Based on the length of her response, Stiefvater enjoys analysis and even joked on Twitter, "Sometimes I think about changing careers to one where I write term papers about the themes in my own novels and sell them on the internet."[110] Stiefvater seems to think deeply about the emotions of her characters and finds value in them—worth a one thousand-word response. Where emotions might be read by some as superfluous to the plot because of their association with the feminine, Stiefvater shows they are part of plot, if not all of it.

More common than these analytical posts is authors sharing Reader-Creators' work, especially on Tumblr. Author Leigh Bardugo often reblogs (a Tumblr term for a user sharing another user's post by putting it on their own blog) artwork from her readers and even has a blog tag for it. Bardugo shares the artwork and comments either on the original post, in the tags, or both. Tumblr user neenya painted Kaz and Inej from Bardugo's *Six of Crows* and Bardugo comments, "This is beyond beautiful. @neenya, I can't thank you enough for creating something so gorgeous. I'll be revising late into the night, and this lifted me up so much."[111] On a drawing of Kaz by Tumblr user nucleicacid, she writes, "I tweeted this, but yo" on the post and "kaz no, kaz YES" in the tags.[112] Sketches from kirstenatic garner an enthusiastic, "I LOVE this Kaz. Thanks @kirstenatic ❤" from Bardugo.[113]

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[109] Maggie Stiefvater, "Contents of Maggie Stiefvater's Brain," Tumblr, February 14, 2016, http://maggie-stiefvater.tumblr.com/post/139300136201/chapter-31-the-church-scene-of-bllb-ends-with.

[110] Maggie Stiefvater, Twitter post, May 29, 2016, 2:29 p.m., https://twitter.com/mstiefvater/status/737002998279352321.

[111] Leigh Bardugo, "Leigh Bardugo," Tumblr, March 31, 2016, http://lbardugo.tumblr.com/post/142051729145/neenya-you-shouldnt-make-friends-with.

[112] Leigh Bardugo, "Leigh Bardugo," Tumblr, April 5, 2016, http://lbardugo.tumblr.com/post/142334147080/nucleicacid-kaz-brekker-one-of-the-6-reasons.

[113] Leigh Bardugo, "Leigh Bardugo," Tumblr, April 10, 2016, http://lbardugo.tumblr.com/post/142608215295/kirstenatic-started-this-book-few-days-ago-and

Other YA authors react similarly to artwork from fans. For example, Marie Lu reblogs a GIF of a work-in-progress from deanpinterester of a character from her Legend series and says, "Absolutely stunning Day portrait! <3 I can't stop watching it cycle….."[114] She comments on a piece done by wren-of-the-rain of Magiano from *The Rose Society*, "I am madly in love with this rendition of Magiano. Ahhh perfection. <3."[115] The artwork and the authors' responses show the dual nature of their relationship. Reader-Creators get to enjoy the author's book and create something of their own based on it, while the author gets to see their characters come to life through the talent of their readers. Both appreciate one another for what they can creatively give the other—the art would not exist without the author's book. The process of creating artwork for a media text is part of regular fan behavior similar to the productions by fans of other kinds of media texts. For example, Harrington and Bielby note how soap opera fans "create fanzines or original artwork, attend fan club conventions or luncheons, write letters to the stars."[116] The creation of YA book artwork plays into fan culture's "open challenge to the 'naturalness' and desirability of dominant cultural hierarchies, a refusal of authorial authority and a violation of intellectual property."[117] However, unlike some creators' responses to fan productions, YA authors typically provide their approval and support of Reader-Creators' works.

It is not always just artwork that YA authors share on their Tumblr blogs. A lot of Reader-Creators make photo sets, or groups of images inspired by a novel, movie, TV show, etc. Based

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[114] Marie Lu, "Marie Lu Books," Tumblr, April 6, 2016, http://marielubooks.tumblr.com/post/142355829478/deanpinterester-but-anyway-heres-a.

[115] Marie Lu, "Marie Lu Books," Tumblr, January 6, 2016, http://marielubooks.tumblr.com/post/136752431248/wren-of-the-rain-magiano-is-the-best-character.

[116] C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 12.

[117] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 18.

on Renee Ahdieh's novel *The Wrath and the Dawn*, a retelling of Arabian Nights, Reader-Creator kingdamianoss put together a set of inspired images: jeweled weaponry, ornate architecture, desert dunes, intricate fashion worn by models who resemble the main characters Shahrzad and Khalid.[118] Another Tumblr user, an-eternal-affliction, made a photo set for Aveyard's Red Queen: photos of models in different suits and dresses with their name and its meaning superimposed over the image, e.g. A red ballroom gown with the main character's name, Mare Barrow, and the origins of her name and their meaning.[119] These photo sets are scrapbooks that allow other readers to visualize the descriptions of the characters and the setting of a novel. They fit an aesthetic, a mood, the Reader-Creator had while reading the book and feeling compelled to ask themselves, "What would this look like?"

When YA authors share these reader-creations on their blogs it is akin to parents posting their child's artwork on the refrigerator. Both of these actions have similar intentions to highlight the work done by someone they care about deeply. By reposting artwork, YA authors communicate to all readers—not just the one whose work they share—that they appreciate them. The use of words like "love" or emoji hearts turn this appreciation into love. The quality of the artwork or creation does not matter to the YA author—and would be up for debate anyway—what matters is that a Reader-Creator took the time to make something based on their novel. The YA author experiences excitement over their characters and worlds being re-interpreted, and Reader-Creators get validated. The acknowledgement from the author that they admire the Reader-Creator's work may override any praise from peers merely because of the author's status.

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[118] Renee Ahdieh, "Renee Ahdieh," Tumblr, April 10, 2016, http://rahdieh.tumblr.com/post/142586024920/kingdamianoss-read-in-2016-the-wrath-and-the.

[119] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, April 7, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/142426909650/an-eternal-affliction-red-queen-series-name.

If YA authors are like mothers to readers, this validation is important, especially for young artists and writers. Just like an ideal parent would not want do discourage a child's passion, YA authors must not either. Sharing posts becomes a form of encouragement, and if YA authors ignore Reader-Creators it comes across as rude, inconsiderate, and bad form. Take for example a message sent to Victoria Aveyard about her character Mare:

> **Anonymous**: I hope you don't get mad, because I love you and I view this as just sharing my opinion. I think that when people choose to spend time, and choose to draw your characters you should be grateful because they took their own time out of their day, to draw for you, and for them. I think you're being rude to people who spent their time to draw your character and like it enough to show you, for you not to share it just because they're not how you saw your character and I didn't know Mare was black.
> **Aveyard**: That's entirely within your rights to think that way, but so many people have pointed out to me how damaging and hurtful it is when I reblog (which reads as support) images of Mare that are whitewashed or don't reflect her mixed race heritage… I'm very flattered that you and others take the time and effort to recreate my characters. I don't think it's rude not to reblog (I mean, I don't have to reblog anything if I don't want to). I'll also say that sometimes people submit fanart to me and then it's impossible for me to post it (for whatever reason submits don't work like asks).

Clearly, this Reader-Creator is upset about Aveyard not sharing certain artwork and directly calls her rude. This Reader-Creator did not receive validation, or support as Aveyard puts it, and lashes out at her because of it. Aveyard does not share certain artwork of Mare because of certain readers who do not identify with a white heroine, which Mare is not canonically. She explains further to a Reader, "[When] fanart started, I reblogged everything I could because it was a small fandom and I wanted to boost it as much as I could. Now I have more perspective. In [*Glass Sword*], Mare plainly states she has brown skin. She's of mixed ethnicity. That's what I'm going to boost now."[120] Aveyard makes it a point to avoid whitewashing her own character by not reposting artwork that portrays Mare as white because it could be harmful to and erase non-white

[120] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, June 2, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/145311253215/now-i-love-your-books-but-i-was-just-wondering.

readers. She chooses to protect other readers' investment in her books and in Mare as a non-white character, which is atypical of a dominant culture that more typically assumes whiteness as the default.

Aveyard's sharing of Reader-Creator artwork exists in a double bind: sharing certain artwork hurts some readers, but not sharing all the artwork hurts others. Were Aveyard not to share any artwork, this choice would most likely receive criticism, too. There is no real decision Aveyard or other YA authors can make that will satisfy Readers and Reader-Creators. Put the artwork up on the fridge, parents are supportive figures; ignore it, and they are negligent parents. Female authors are expected to be sensitive to their Reader-Creators and foster their creativity. Sharing artwork is not something YA authors need to do, but they might garner criticism if they do not.

Female YA authors must be supportive in the right capacity—kind words, heart emojis—or else they are rude and take their readers for granted. Ignoring fan works could mean losing Readers and Reader-Creators and being seen as rude. Despite being separate from the YA author's original book, authors are expected to respond to Reader-Creator fan works with the same emotional support as they provide Readers. There is the sense that Reader-Creators want the author to comment, to see their hard work, and to give them approval for their creations. The expectations then of the YA author are that they are receptive and loving to the work, like a mother whose child brings home an art piece from school.

Bloggers

The third type of reader is the Blogger, a professional reader who posts reviews of books online for their own readers. One main difference between a Blogger and a Reader-Creator is the

content: Bloggers write reviews rather than create another type of work and sometimes that content is monetized by advertising. Bloggers with large enough followings might become a marketing tool for publishers. Advanced reader copies (ARCs) get sent to Bloggers by publishing houses in order for the Blogger to review and, hopefully, generate excitement before the book's release. The biggest difference between Bloggers and Reader-Creators is the way in which Bloggers and YA authors interact in a friendly, feminized discourse riddled with tension.

Before the publication of her novel *A Study in Charlotte* came out, Brittany Cavallaro interacted with Bloggers who were sent ARCs:

> **Cavallaro**: [A] number of YA Bloggers have decided they really like the book, which is amazing, and have been really amazing advocates sort of out of no where for the book, which is great. … There are a number of YA book Bloggers who have reached out and been wonderful. Actually, what's really interesting is that… I think the Bloggers that it's connected with—and I think they're really the only people who have read the book right outside of my debut community and librarians and booksellers, and I've heard from them, too.

In this case, Bloggers were among Cavallaro's first readers. As she describes, the Bloggers helped push the marketing of *A Study in Charlotte* further, generating buzz about it where possible. What makes a Blogger's generation of excitement for a novel's release different than a typical reader sharing their love for a book? First, Bloggers tend to have access to the novels early, before the masses can purchase it. Because Bloggers get books before release, they can help shape what will be popular and support assertions from other Bloggers or writers who also read a novel early. Second, Bloggers see themselves as professionals, whether or not their blog is monetized:

> **Cavallaro**: I'll say I've been really impressed by the professionalism of a lot of the YA Bloggers. They have their shit together. They write really professional emails, they organize these giant blog tours, and features… It's really impressive and they're 16 or 17.

> … I think developed these nice conversations with fans who are usually Bloggers, and so the endgame there for them is, "Let's talk about this a little bit. Would you do something for my blog? Would you do an interview? Or a feature or something?"

Bloggers are fans with a reason to reach out to authors and an opportunity to speak with someone they might admire. Of course, a blog is not an excuse to access authors—as Cavallaro explains, the Bloggers work hard and take their work seriously. However, a reader without a blog might be out of luck when trying to get attention from their favorite author. A Blogger produces a review or an interview, something tangible for other readers to enjoy, while engaging with authors as friends.

Bloggers have much closer proximity to authors than Readers and Reader-Creators do because of their connection to the publishing industry through their reviews. This friendship, or potential for one, is the big difference between a Blogger and the other types of readers. Authors even identify these interactions as a type of friendship:

> **Cavallaro**: I feel like we can actually have a substantial back and forth where it feels like people talking to each other. And Twitter does, too, but you're working with such small amounts of space that like it's mostly like… Either, I love your book in emojis or like, you know, very brief sort of back and forths.
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> **Henry**: It's very strange because I feel immediately like these people are my friends. (laughs) Because I interact with them and they're so kind and funny and they like, you know, a lot of the same books you like, they probably struggle with some of the same books you struggle with, in some cases, and you get to know them a surprising amount.
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> **Heilig**: I feel like I interact with a lot of people as though they're friends. Like, internet friends, but friends. Just in a… If someone tweets a picture of their dog and, you know, it's a cute dog, I'll tell them, "That's a great dog." Or if someone says they're having a bad day I like to tell them that I hope their day gets better. And I also like to support the other authors that I know and try to make sure that I boost—signal boost their posts. And I also like to read what the Bloggers are posting, just to try to get a sense of what they're looking for.

Because the Bloggers' and authors' worlds are greatly intertwined, it makes sense that they would develop friendships with one another. This relationship is completely symbiotic in its nature, especially from a marketing standpoint. The Bloggers need authors in order to write reviews for their sites, and the authors need Bloggers to generate excitement about their novels so they gain more readers. The mutually beneficial promotion does not diminish the friendship between the Blogger and author—creating a genuine friendship is not a negative. However, because of the instant friendship mixed with business pursuits, a distinct, feminized tension develops between authors and Bloggers.

As seen with Victoria Aveyard, when female authors are not viewed as polite, considerate, and sensitive to their readers there can be backlash. Bloggers and authors mix the business of the publishing world with their friendships and a Blogger's role is to review the author's book, which may result in a positive or negative review. When reviews are positive, Bloggers and authors are friendly to one another, but when reviews are negative the relationship between the two gets blurry:

> **Cavallaro**: But mostly I think it's my job to kind of like, promote other people's books, talk about books I love, be a part of the community, and let the people who are reading my book or other people's books, talk about them amongst themselves. Because I don't really need to be a part of that conversation necessarily, you know?

While Cavallaro expresses her desire to stay out of Bloggers' business, she has retweeted reviews about her book, *A Study in Charlotte*.[121] Keeping distance from positive reviews is seemingly difficult for authors, and understandably so after all the work they put into writing their novels. Outside of reviewing books, perhaps authors and Bloggers can be friends because work (writing

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[121] Brittney Cavallaro, Twitter post, April 21, 2016, 7:45 a.m., https://twitter.com/skippingstones/status/723130506024497156.

books or reviews) is not the focal point of their conversations. However, this might not be the case, as Emily Henry observes:

> **Emily Henry**: I know that there are reviewers who have told me that they, when they write a good review they post it everywhere.… And then sometimes they write a bad review, and it's an author that they've kind of befriended…. they'll put it on their site and just not push it at all. Not tell anyone that it's there…. I've tried just to give a lot of space to those Bloggers. Sometimes I don't follow them back on Twitter even if we've interacted a lot. Sometimes I do and even their anxiety about writing bad reviews will come up in conversation and I try to say, I mean, we understand, we don't love every book.

Indeed, Bloggers and reviewers do not love every book, and they can have an influence over what becomes visible in the book community.[122] Most likely if a novel comes from a large publishing house—Penguin Random House, for example—there might be a substantial marketing budget for the book in question; however, a book from a smaller publishing house might benefit greatly from Blogger attention and increase its success on the market. This concept is similar to the way in which film critics might boost the success of independent films, but movies that have larger releases might not rely heavily on critic influence for ticket sales.[123]

When it comes to YA novels, Bloggers have specific appeal to publishing marketers because of the extra marketing reach to teenagers, a desirable demographic for a lot of advertisers. Teenage YA Bloggers might have more influence in the community because YA novels are *for* teenagers, though someone's age can be difficult to discern on any social media. Adults review YA novels through *Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and other sites, but a review from a teenager who blogs as a hobby might carry much more influence because it comes

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[122] Peter Boatwright, Suman Basuroy, Wagner Kamakura, "Reviewing the reviewers: The impact of individual film critics on box office performance," *Quantitative Marketing and Economics* 5, no. 4 (2007): 421, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11129-007-9029-1.

[123] Ibid.

from the book's intended audience. Teenage Bloggers interacting with adult YA authors adds youth to the already existing tension of a professionalized hobby of reviewing novels—sometimes at a publisher's request after sending a Blogger a book—and the friendship built up between the two people. Heidi Heilig describes balancing her interactions with Bloggers:

> **Heidi Heilig**: Big name authors with millions of followers kind of sicking their followers on these little Bloggers with maybe a thousand followers or two or even ten. It's just not appropriate. So I think that sort of thing makes people feel unsafe and uncomfortable…. Unless someone tagged me in a review of my book and specifically invites me to come and read it, I don't want to make it seem like I'm going and searching for people who are talking about me and coming in un-welcomed.

While the authors and Bloggers are friends, there is the sense that they do not want to step on each others' toes and do want to treat one another with sensitivity. Concerning oneself with the emotions of another person is seen as a feminized quality. The authors fear overstepping or making Bloggers anxious about posting reviews—they worry about hurting someone else's feelings. Bloggers fear giving completely honest reviews because they are friends with the authors or admire them; similarly, the authors fear encroaching on the Bloggers' space so they can give honest reviews. Age complicates this more so: YA authors champion teenagers—why else write about them?—and sending a scathing tweet to a teenage Blogger after a review is extremely fraught given the power difference. The anxiety and tension of reviews might lead Bloggers and authors to cease any professional engagement with one another; however, not interacting with one another would hurt both Bloggers and authors from a business standpoint: they need one another.

Despite this tension and expressed concern to mind the line between Bloggers and authors, they continue to engage with one another. For example, Heidi Heilig retweeted a video

of Blogger Emma (@AwkwordlyEmma) unboxing her copy of Heilig's book, and said, "My heart. You guise. Emma was the first book Blogger who ever added [*The Girl From Everywhere*] to her [To Be Read] and she has a place in my heart!"[124] Similarly, Emily Henry retweeted a link to a review of her novel *The Love that Split the World* from Kaitlin (@NextPagePlease_) and said, "💗love this💗."[125] Even these two YA authors who are apprehensive about responding to Bloggers, still do respond. By retweeting these reviews, Heilig and Henry show they are grateful and appreciative. Because Henry was tagged by Kaitlin on Twitter, this opens Henry up to responding—as thin a line as it is. Both Henry and Heilig respond politely to the Bloggers with a lot of love and emojis, just like other YA authors in other spaces with different types of readers. However, what makes these interactions different is the tension between the parties based on their role in the book community and industry.

Bloggers and authors find themselves trapped in conventions and expectations of femininity and age—they must be kind, considerate, and sensitive to one another. These expectations come from culture, but also from standards the YA literature community tries to enforce as a whole. Because the YA literature community is made up primarily of women of varying ages, these feminized traits are the social norm. Essentially, the YA community is kind, considerate, and sensitive to one another not solely because of culture, but because of the community's desire to uphold these qualities. For example, the notion that adult YA authors should be respectful of teenagers and give them space in a community based on books about

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[124] Heidi Heilig, Twitter post, February 17, 2016, 12:08 p.m., https://twitter.com/heidiheilig/status/700018994414252033.

[125] Emily Henry, Twitter post, March 3, 2016, 8:06 p.m., https://twitter.com/EmilyHenryWrite/status/705575141040910336.

them stems from the community's desires. These desires set up expectations for all community interactions, but Bloggers often have more of a fraught relationship with YA authors. Business ventures create tension for Bloggers and YA authors: both have their own agendas for their work, which could be altered because of their friendship in the first place. This is not to say that friendship between YA authors and Bloggers is a bad thing, but it is something that could potentially inhibit the Blogger, who must make a personal choice whether to review a friend's book or not. The connection between the way YA authors portrayal of themselves and their career is analyzed in chapter three.

Similarly, the friendship inhibits authors, who need to communicate with Bloggers, otherwise they might be viewed as rude, which would not help their reader-base or career. Culture's expectations of femininity put authors and Bloggers in the awkward position of being friends who are just trying to do their writing jobs. These feminized demands mimic the experience of other women in different industries: women should be kind to all and, as seen with Aveyard, not want success for themselves, else they be stereotyped as aggressive. In all workspaces, women are simultaneously punished for acting feminine as well as masculine. No relationship scenario with the Bloggers would reach a balanced medium. Too cold of a response to Bloggers could mean more negative reviews, which would not help a YA author advance his or her career. Acting too friendly could put their career on standby as Bloggers tip toe around their reviews for their author friend's books. The masculinized nature of the publishing world does not account for these friendships between YA authors and Bloggers, yet, it expects that all of these women will embody feminized traits in order to succeed, which is what the tension between the two groups hinges upon.

Conclusion

The three types of readers (1) Reader, (2) Reader-Creator, and (3) Blogger all interact with YA authors in different, gendered ways. The first type, Readers, ask questions about novels, craft, or simply what a book meant to them. From these messages, YA authors respond to Readers' emotional investment with their own extra emotional work. YA Authors get dubbed "mom" by many Readers and must be loving and nurturing regardless of their own age. When YA authors are not perfectly "mom"-like, there can be backlash from Readers who then try to police authors' tones and actions on social media—especially if that author seems to want any monetary success from her books.

The second type of readers are the Reader-Creators who make their own content based on a YA author's novel. These Reader-Creators might make GIF sets, artwork, fan-fiction, and many other creative projects inspired by the novel in question. YA authors reaffirm and support these Reader-Creators on social media by sharing artwork or replying to a question with their own analysis. The authors' encouragement shows that they appreciate the Reader-Creators and they use words like "love" and heart emojis to do so. The authors validate the Reader-Creators and when they do not or seem ungrateful, there can be more criticism. Not showing appreciation for Reader-Creators can be just as bad as showing appreciation to a few of them.

Finally, the third type of readers are the Bloggers: professional readers who review books as a hobby, which can sometimes be monetized and could be turned into a career. Bloggers help to market YA novels and may be part of a publisher's marketing campaign—some Bloggers receive advanced reader copies to review. YA authors and Bloggers develop friendships, but these friendships are riddled with tension given that Bloggers review authors' work. Negative

reviews might ruin a friendship, but Bloggers want to be honest to their own readers. Authors try to give Bloggers space, but when reviews are positive, they tend to interact with one another. Bloggers have influence, and teenage Bloggers might have the most as the target audience for YA literature. Age only adds tension to authors and Bloggers' relationship as it complicates power dynamics, especially when it comes to authors responding to reviews whether they are positive or negative. While there might be tension between YA authors and Bloggers about how and when to interact with one another, they continue to form friendships, and to a point need one another in order to do their work.

In all interactions, readers expect YA authors to respond with emotion, sensitivity, and nurturance. When authors deviate from these feminine traits, the various types of readers tend to criticize and police them. A perceived failing to uphold these traits can be a threat to the YA literature community, given its feminized status. The self-surveillance of YA authors is similar to any other cultural arena for women where they must police themselves to adhere to certain expectations. These feminine qualities that readers expect of authors are not negative traits to possess; however, the requirement of YA authors to engage and embody these traits and the fallout when they do not shows how gendered the YA literature space online is in an already gendered place in publishing.

Chapter 3: Authors' New Work Practices and Reader Influence

The YA sensation, *Twilight*, came to Stephenie Meyer in a dream, one that told of a sparkling, frightening vampire boy and an ordinary human girl falling in love. Meyer explains on her website how she feverishly wrote Edward and Bella's story and that the characters "were, quite literally, voices in [her] head. They simply wouldn't shut up. [She would] stay up as late as [she] could stand trying to get all the stuff in [her] mind typed out."[126] The story compelled Meyer to keep writing at odd hours and whenever she could so she could find out how the story ended. Her writing process consisted of working in between her kids' swimming lessons, keeping a notebook by her bed, and typing out scenes late at night when all her kids were asleep. This process worked for Meyer and *Twilight* was published in October 2005, just about two years after she began writing it.

Once *Twilight* was out in the world, Meyer's interaction with readers did not go beyond signings and blog posts on her official website. She continued to keep the rise of social media at arm's length, even in 2008 when the manuscript of *Midnight Sun—Twilight* from Edward's point of view—was leaked. Meyer wrote in a blog post, "I did not want my readers to experience *Midnight Sun* before it was completed, edited and published…. Unfortunately, with the Internet, it is easy for people to obtain and share items that do not legally belong to them."[127] Ultimately, Meyer made the draft available on her site, but expressed, "I'd rather my fans not read this version."[128] This leak occurred during the development of the new digital age; social media sites

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[126] Stephenie Meyer, "The Story Behind *Twilight*," accessed June 9, 2016, http://stepheniemeyer.com/twilight.html.

[127] Stephenie Meyer, "Midnight Sun: Edward's Version of *Twilight*," last modified August 28, 2008, accessed June 9, 2016, http://stepheniemeyer.com/midnightsun.html.

[128] Ibid.

like Twitter (2006) and Tumblr (2007) began, and sites like these opened up authors to readers, and readers to sharing leaked manuscripts with one another. *Midnight Sun* never came to be because someone Meyer trusted leaked the draft, but this example speaks to the power of the internet, fandom, and readers. Had fans and critics alike not shared the *Midnight Sun* manuscript, the leak might not have meant anything. Instead, *Midnight Sun* is "cursed," never to see any bookshelves.[129]

Readers' involvement with and critiques of *Midnight Sun* impacted Meyer's writing process and ultimately her decision whether to continue drafting the book. With the growing presence of YA authors' work online, the potential for reader influence on authors increases. As YA literature continues to grow as an industry—as mentioned in chapter one, there was a 22.4 percent sales increase of children's and YA literature from 2013 to 2014[130]—the answer to a question of influence is not a simple yes or no. These numbers speak to the popularity of YA literature and a rise in the number of readers and potential fans for YA authors to interact with online. More interactions mean more instances of potential influence from readers on YA authors and the content of their novels.

With more involvement online come different conversations for YA authors to be a part of and in which to participate. Authors' time must be divided between writing a novel and engaging with readers and other industry professionals. The growth of YA literature as a genre puts more eyes on those creating the content, and because of this, YA authors have stepped up their social responsibility, joining librarians and educators, and a history of adults trying to

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[129] Megan Lewis, "Meyer has no plans to release Midnight Sun after EL James' Grey," *Entertainment Weekly*, October 9, 2015, http://www.ew.com/article/2015/10/09/stephenie-meyer-midnight-sun-grey.

[130] Laura Stampler, "Adult Books Sales Are Down and Young Adult Soars in 2014," *Time*, December 14, 2014, http://time.com/3636601/young-adult-book-sales-2014/.

regulate content and products for children and teenagers—especially girls.[131] Conversations between YA authors do not solely revolve around books, promotion, or writing, though these are topics discussed by them. Social media like Twitter work alongside current events, which is why discussions about representation mix into YA authors' every day conversations.

As seen in chapter two, many YA authors interact with readers on social media with empathy and sensitivity. These attitudes transfer over to YA authors' industry-related conversations fueled by authors' sense of social responsibility to their readers, such as the inclusion of more LGBT+ characters, boosting #OwnVoices books (novels written by marginalized authors about marginalized characters with a variety of intersectional identities), and the practice of using "sensitivity readers," beta readers that attend to matters of social identity in an unfinished manuscript. These conversations aim not only to benefit and diversify YA literature, but to open up different spaces for their diverse readers. Because social media have become part of YA authors' work practice, so too are these conversations part of authors' work.

I argue that the social media presence of YA authors engrains itself in their work practice. The internet factors into YA authors' writing routines and involvement is heavily encouraged by the publishing industry in order to brand themselves as authors, to network their careers, and to talk to readers. Interviews with YA authors Victoria Schwab, Brittany Cavallaro, and Tessa Gratton reveal the difficulty to balance writing and social media use. While they are expected to be online, that impacts their time used to write their books. I analyze the unwritten rules that YA authors are expected to follow while displaying feminized traits. Tweeting out industry news might impact their career, but not tweeting at all might do the same. YA authors' involvement

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[131] Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture*, 1920-1945, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 4-5.

online links back to the emotional work they do with their readers on a regular basis as discussed in chapter two.

Moreover, the constant interaction YA authors have with their audience impacts the content of the novels they write. More social media presence means YA authors are more conscious of their social responsibility—the impact their novels might have on that audience. One example of this sensibility in action is the increase of LGBT+ literature. YA authors influence one another to be responsible for their readers and what they write. However, as additional interviews with YA authors Heidi Heilig and Emily Henry show, beyond a sense of them as young, the audience is not necessarily taken into account in the book's original conception. The focus on sensitivity readers and social responsibility adds to the feminized position of the YA author in relation to their audience. Many YA authors go through extra emotional work interacting with readers; now, these authors take into account the emotional responses from readers and other authors in order to make more inclusive media. How do the interactions YA authors experience online impact the content of their novels? How do sensitivity reads factor into the emotional work of this already feminized industry?

Work Practice

During the process of writing *Twilight*, Stephenie Meyer researched names and settings through the internet. As she writes on her website, "I turned to Google, as I do for all my research needs."[132] Notably, Meyer does not have any public social media accounts, and social media itself was in its early stages when she was writing, so interactions with readers in those spaces did not factor in to her writing process. In the mid-2010s, many YA authors have social media

[132] Meyer, "The Story Behind *Twilight*."

accounts, which makes Meyer the exception rather than the rule. In this context, the internet often plays a role in YA authors' writing processes beyond research, as Brittany Cavallaro, Heidi Heilig, and Tessa Gratton describe:

> **Cavallaro**: Now that I'm not teaching, I'm writing full time, I sometimes have to like strand myself somewhere (laughs). Go somewhere that doesn't have wifi with my computer, be dropped off and have it be too far to go home—if I need to do like a really long and uninterrupted chunk of work.
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> **Heilig**: I basically sit down at my computer at about eight o'clock and if there are no—if there's no work related tasks for me to do, I have Twitter and Facebook open.… I go back and forth between my manuscript and Twitter all day until about three o'clock when I close everything down.
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> **Gratton**: I get up before dawn, drink some coffee and exercise, then while I'm cooling down I read the news and check in on Twitter. After enraging myself with world events, I get cleaned up and dressed for the day, and try to be sitting down with my open document by 9am.… I also allow myself pretty free access to Twitter, but time myself on other sites like that amazing time-suck Tumblr.

Each author grapples with their relationship with the internet during their writing process. It can be a research tool, as for Meyer, and it can be a means to network and brand oneself as an author, but can also be a "time-suck" and distract the authors from actually writing. Cavallaro notes that she might travel somewhere that does not have wifi in order to work, which speaks to the internet's pull, as Gratton described it.

Clearly for these authors, a balance must be found between social media use and writing—a conflict that perhaps was not the case even ten years ago. Now the internet and social media embed themselves into these writers' routines in multiple ways, as can be seen with Emily Henry and Victoria Schwab's routines:

> **Henry**: It's pretty much: wake up, get coffee, am on the internet for too long (laughs) just kind of catching up on things.… The first couple weeks are really just a creative blast that's really fast and fun and loose and not too tamed at all. And then afterword it starts

> slowing down quite a bit because I have to actually think about things, why things are broken, make a plan, and start with the macro and move into the micro revisions. It's just a lot slower and those are…. the days I'm a lot more engrained in the YA community online because I'm procrastinating (laughs).
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> **Schwab**: My drafting process looks a bit different than my editing my process…. [I] try and do most of my actual writing in the morning because I find that as the day goes on I have less attention for it. I start getting distracted by email and by promotion things and the internet, so I'm always really cognizant of my need to get words down in the AM.

The YA literature community has emerged as more authors, readers, and aspiring writers alike have joined social media sites like Twitter. As Henry notes, she engages with the YA literature community online, which she sees as procrastination, but surely also helps foster her brand as an author. Schwab, who wrote nine books before having one appear on the *New York Times* Best Seller's list,[133] slowly cultivated her own social media following and presence in the YA literature and adult science fiction/fantasy communities. For Schwab, promotion is part of being an author and part of social media, and her attention to her social media presence has paid off as her authorial career continues to rise. Both Henry and Schwab use social media as a tool to connect with their community and audience, which factors into their writing routines and duties as authors.

While many YA authors engage readers online, publishing houses and literary agencies do not require authors to have social media; however, a social media presence is often encouraged. New Leaf Literary & Media, Inc.—a literary agency that represents *New York Times* Best Selling YA authors such as Victoria Aveyard, Holly Black, Susan Dennard, Kody Keplinger, Danielle Paige, and Leigh Bardugo[134]—runs a Tumblr account and one of the agents, usually

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[133] Victoria Schwab, "VictoriaLand," Tumblr, June 10, 2016, http://veschwab.tumblr.com/post/145725050088/yesterday-i-walked-into-a-bookstore-and-saw-this.

[134] "Authors," New Leaf Literary, accessed June 9, 2016, http://www.newleafliterary.com/authors/.

Suzie Townsend, answers questions from aspiring writers. The questions that New Leaf's Tumblr receives range from how to structure a query letter to book recommendations. Some aspiring writers have questions when it comes to social media:

> **Anonymous**: Hi! Which social media do you consider to be the best one for a writer aiming at a young audience (YA/MG)--twitter, facebook or tumblr? I noticed quite a lot of YA authors run their websites on blogspot, but it seems to be done mostly because it's an easy to handle platform.
> **NL**: It depends on what you're good at. Sign up for all of them, try them out and decide which ones you like best.
>
> **Anonymous**: What happens if a writer is not comfortable using their personal social media to interact with fans? … Do authors have options when it comes to social media? … Could one do a Q&A page to interact with fans instead?
> **NL**: Have a tumblr. You can repost fan art and things that you like and have an ask me anything page to interact with fans.
>
> **Anonymous**: I followed NL's advice to have SOME form of social media + started a Twitter account. (It's going swimmingly). What should I do next? That is, Agent to Writer, what would you like to see (reasonably) in a writer prior to signing?
> **NL**: Nice! Start networking. Follow authors and publishing people you like and start conversations–or join conversations.

None of the responses from New Leaf Literary insist that an author needs to have social media; however, given the questions received about social media accounts, the concept is clearly strongly encouraged. One anonymous Tumblr user even comments, "I followed NL's advice to have SOME form of social media," which solidifies that social media has become part of an author's brand. Social media presence for YA authors means marketing, promoting, and interacting with readers—essentially, the authors become their own marketing team. Who better to promote a book than the author?

Alison Presley, a marketing manager for Chronicle Books, says of social media, "At one point, social media was seen as a 'nice to have' by authors. It's not a 'nice to have' any more. Fans

really expect to have that direct connection to authors." In the same vein, YA author Simone Elkeles comments, "You spend 25% of your time writing and 75% of your time interacting with your fans, or at least I do."[135] It appears that YA authors are encouraged to have social media in order to connect with readers and fans, but as Schwab's answer shows, that is not its only purpose for authors. Clearly from the New Leaf Literary Tumblr answers, networking with other authors, agents, and publishing persona is just as important to an author's job as talking to readers online. As YA author Maggie Stiefvater points out, "No one is the boss of me," but there is still emphasis put on social media by agents, editors, and publishing houses to use social media, even if they do not outright say it.[136]

Furthermore, there are some unwritten rules to being an author online; however, the "dos" and "do nots" have no official, stagnant list. Where YA authors are encouragingly nudged to be social online, agent Jessica Faust from BookEnds Literary Agency writes, "Social media is a fun place to share the highs and lows of everything that's going on in your career, but sharing too much during contract negotiations can hinder the work your agent is doing." Faust continues and says that, "even a 'woo-hoo, exciting news to come' could be risky, especially if your agent is only negotiating with one publisher."[137] Her advice for authors is to wait until the negotiation is over before announcing or hinting at a publishing deal. This advice may seem like common business sense—wait until something is official—but it shows the dual nature of social media.

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[135] Karen Springen, "Teenage Tweetland," *Publishers Weekly* 260, no. 19 (May 13, 2013): 31, Professional Development Collection, EBSCOhost (accessed October 23, 2015).

[136] Maggie Stiefvater, "Contents of Maggie Stiefvater's Brain," Tumblr, December 7, 2015, http://maggie-stiefvater.tumblr.com/post/134743886376/im-just-curious-if-being-a-popular-author-on-a.

[137] Jessica Faust, "When it Comes to Social Media, Everyone is Reading," BookEnds Literary Agency, March 1, 2016, http://bookendsliterary.com/index.php/2016/03/01/when-it-comes-to-social-media-everyone-is-reading/.

Where YA authors must use it for the more fun aspect of connecting with readers, they must also be careful what they write as not to affect the business side of their job.

Because navigating social media can be tricky, children's author Jess Keating wrote a "social media playbook" for authors of any genre. On her website, she shares her playbook, which she presented at New England's Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) 2016 conference, and titles her post: "YOU WILL BE GOOGLED– How to foster genuine relationships using social media (without annoying the bleep out of everyone.)" She claims social media will not make or break someone's writing career, rather authors can use social media to further it, after all "social media is where [their] readers are." Keating urges writers that "social media is a way to find [their] people, pure and simple. It's not about pretending to be something. Or trying to get a billion people to follow [them]. Or landing some book deal."[138]

Ironically, Keating writes that social media is not about landing a book deal when she explains how her engagement on social media later helped her and her agent find an editor for a non-fiction book. She does note that her engagement on Twitter with the editor is not what sold the book, "but having a relationship with someone online before [authors] start talking business can help both parties get a feel for each other." This advice sends mixed messages to aspiring and published authors alike: Twitter will not help you land a book deal, but it is a factor in any potential future book deals—"Before I signed with my agent, the incredible Kat Rushall, we tweeted each other about cheese and garden gnomes." Conversations with agents or editors could become something later on, so authors should be conscious of those conversations, but still

[138] Jess Keating, "Social Media Playbook for Authors!" Jess Keating Official Site, accessed June 10, 2016, http://jesskeating.com/for-writers/jess-keating-playbook/.

"[express themselves] in a genuine way." Keating encourages writers to add value and embrace their inner weirdo and reminds authors, "You don't need to *always* be on." However, this advice is directly contradicted when she writes, "I never post anything negative. … I can't stand the thought of someone clicking on a profile of mine and seeing a negative/angry/whiny post. Kids read my tweets. So do parents and teachers. If you're a kidlit author, this is definitely something to keep in mind."[139]

Not only are agents and editors keeping track (in a general sense) of authors' social media posts, but readers are, too. Thus, the common wisdom is that whereas authors should be genuine, they should only be the positive version of themselves for all of these audiences. The business and personal sides of being an author collide on social media in this branding strategy—be the correct authorial version of yourself. But these assumptions can box in authors. Recall the way Victoria Aveyard received backlash from readers for allegedly not adhering to feminine characteristics while interacting with them. These social media guidelines for authors to be the "correct" version of themselves limits female authors to these expectations of femininity.

In Keating's enthusiasm for social media, she repeats the same gendered rhetoric discussed in chapter two. The encouragement to children's authors, many of whom are women, to only be positive online makes a feminized position a precondition of their success as authors. Being positive and encouraging others is the same kind of emotional work that authors already do with their readers. Authors should embody an uplifting mother on social media—but be genuine about it. In contrast, a more careerist and masculinized effort to try to gain followers and internet fame is frowned upon. Scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser observes that successful branding

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[139] Ibid.

and "what is understood (and experienced) as authentic is considered such precisely because it is perceived as *not* commercial."[140] Ironically, the commercial space is often feminized because of the gendered nature of the home: men worked outside the home and women worked in it, and advertising worked in this gendered way, especially for products like cosmetics and soap.[141]

Because of the gendered nature of advertising for commercial products, branding, then, is more authentic when it is less feminine. Commercial aspirations, while YA authors might have them, should not be discussed outright because they are not seen as genuine. As seen with Victoria Aveyard and the criticism that has followed her, ambition for YA authors and children's authors alike must be the correct kind—the correct kind of femininity. Aveyard is pressured to present herself as genuine, which does not include discussions of her career. Branding that does not revolve around the commercial is what Banet-Weiser says makes "individuals feel safe, secure, relevant, and authentic."[142] These sentiments are exactly what readers want to feel from YA authors and the authors risk losing their audience if they do not comply. Scholars Suzanne Leonard and Diane Negra discuss this issue in terms of reality TV star and entrepreneur Bethenny Frankel where she must promote her "true self," while navigating what she wants versus what the public wants from her.[143] YA authors must also be their true selves and balance their career desires with how their audience wants to interact with them.

Similarly, female celebrities with intensive branding campaigns constantly walk the line

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[140] Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University, 2012), 10.

[141] Ibid, 23.

[142] Ibid, 9.

[143] Suzanne Leonard and Diane Negra, "After Ever After: Bethenny Frankel, Self-Branding, and the 'New Intimacy of Work,'" in *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century*, ed. Elana Levine, (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2015), 204.

of "failing at femininity… [and] they are closely tracked for signs of hypocrisy."[144] This notion rings true for YA authors as well. Anything a YA author says on social media could contribute to them failing at femininity, thus they must carefully watch what they say or promote. Self-surveillance can come in any form for women: body, attitude, and even their words, and is part of emotional work—especially when it comes to careers that have an aspect of branding. The emotional work that YA authors complete online emphasizes being nice,[145] which culture expects women to be anyway in any context, entrepreneurial or otherwise. One wrong tweet that does not seem positive, uplifting, or gracious could mean losing out on agents, editors, and readers. Striking a balance between appropriate femininity and their professional goals leads YA authors to need to constantly self-surveil. While this might be exhausting emotional work for female authors to complete, they must remember, "everything [they] post is a possible first impression," so be nice, be interested, and be "sunshine" online.[146]

Audience Influence

Given the constant interactions with readers online, YA authors struggle to manage social media use while working on a book. There is a desire to keep a private, written work *private*, and Emily Henry addresses this notion in the interviews when she says, "I don't really talk about what I'm working on until I have a full draft. And I like to keep it very personal because even though everyone's really supportive and great, bringing in those external voices can just add a lot more stress for me, and [a] lot more pressure." As Maggie Stiefvater works on her next book to

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[144] Ibid, 210.

[145] Keating, "Social Media Playbook for Authors!"

[146] Ibid.

follow The Raven Cycle, she expresses that she cannot talk about it,[147] not because of contracts, but because, "I'm enjoying writing something with no expectations."[148]

Authors wanting to keep the draft of a manuscript private is understandable—especially given what happened to *Midnight Sun*—but it directly conflicts with the publicness of social media. As seen in chapter two, readers want to engage with YA authors daily about different topics, but the time authors use to talk on social media cuts into their writing. A current work in progress might be in the draft stage and any outside commentary might impact how the author feels about the work, which is exactly what happened to Stephenie Meyer. While readers might want YA authors to talk about their current projects with the same gusto as they do about new releases or just what happens during their day, prematurely discussing a work in progress might impact their career. Because writing is a YA author's career, some privacy on social media about new projects might behoove them. This privacy also helps build anticipation for a novel's eventual reveal—it might help authors to write the book rather than get distracted and write about it on social media.

Platforms like Twitter bring in more voices and opinions from other authors, editors, agents, and readers, all of which might distract any creators from their goal. Who do authors take into account while working on a project? As Stiefvater says, she likes to write something without pressure from her audience, but can YA authors really avoid thinking of their audience as they write? YA authors try to ignore social media while writing a manuscript draft, but they do have a specific audience in mind as they write. Readers are YA authors' audience on social media and

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[147] Maggie Stiefvater, Twitter post, June 23, 2016, 3:09 p.m., https://twitter.com/mstiefvater/status/746072605443170304.

[148] Maggie Stiefvater, Twitter post, June 23, 2016, 3:37 p.m., https://twitter.com/mstiefvater/status/746079864504082434.

for their novels; however, readers are not necessarily who authors have in mind while writing the first draft of a book. In fact there is almost a consensus about who they do have in mind while writing:

> **Brittany Cavallaro**: I like to say that I write for myself at 16…. Ultimately, I want to write a book that works and that makes me happy. … Things that give me pleasure as somebody who loves reading in this genre. And I guess you could say, then we could translate that to what readers in this kind of genre like, too.
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> **Tessa Gratton**: If I know the genre of my story I might be thinking about the sort of reaction and questions I want to raise for readers of that genre - assuming they're familiar with the imagery and tropes and ideas I'm playing with. But usually, I write FOR myself - current Tessa, or 16 year-old Tessa, or Tessa who has questions about something.
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> **Emily Henry**: I think really when it comes down to it, I'm writing for a 16 year-old version of myself and for people like that. But I don't (clears throat) I don't have to actively think about that because I'm still so connected to that. I'm a person who's never wanted to grow up.
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> **Victoria Schwab**: I am writing for the version of myself that I was at that age. So I have middle grade novels—middle school age novels—that are definitely written to 10 year-old me, and my YA novels are written for 16 year-old me, and what it was that I loved at that time. And then my adult novels are written for who I am now. … I really believe that authors are their first readers. We have to be in love with the project before anybody else will.

The YA authors claim that they think about a younger version of themselves when they write their first drafts. The uniformity of their answers might signify a common, decided-on response for YA authors. It could be that YA authors have an answer on hand that should satisfy curious adults online who might be critical of their choice to write for teenagers—simply saying, "I like to write for teens" might not sate those critics. Enjoying writing for teenagers might be a more acceptable reason in the YA literature community, but it also implies that adults who write for teenagers need some kind of explanation. Authors who write adult fiction are not asked, "Why do you write for adults?" Adult fiction exists in a completely different cultural space than YA

literature. Saying, “I like to write” might not be enough in a culture that already under-values women and sees teenage culture as less-than adult.

Therefore, a common answer, like, “I write for myself at 16” may form as a defense—a defense that adult fiction authors do not need to have because their novels are not scrutinized in the same manner. This answer may be specific to YA authors and not other creators who make media content for teenagers. Constant social media use and queries from other writers and adult readers puts this answer on the tip of these YA authors’ tongues. It is also possible that these YA authors find motivation in their younger selves and the types of books they wish they could have read when they were sixteen. Their novel then becomes for their teenage readers now, so they can have the novel that the YA authors did not at that age.

Based on the YA authors’ answers, they write for themselves, despite potential distractions on social media and the internet more generally. Given that social media has become part of the authors’ work practice and even daily routine, it seems possible that they might think of their social media audience and readers as they write. According to Emily Henry, there may be a moment where the shift from writing “for myself” turns into writing “for an audience”:

> **Emily Henry**: When I finish the first draft, that’s already when it becomes not just for me…. But the first draft I’m like totally in it with teenagers—I just am one. And later I think is when I try to remember I’m an adult and think more of writing for teens.

This assertion implies that during the initial first draft of a YA book, the authors have their 16 year-old-self in mind; however, once that draft is complete the target audience becomes a bigger concern and focal point. In the same way, Victoria Schwab says, “The difference between a writer, in my opinion, and a published author is that the writer writes and the author writes for an audience.” Obviously, both Henry and Schwab’s comments complicate the concept of writing for

the 16 year-old-self. Their comments also highlight the difference between being an author as an occupation versus a hobby. As previously mentioned, YA authors can use, "I write for my 16 year-old-self" as a defense for their craft—while still genuinely meaning it, because as author Holly Black says, "Write for your reader self."[149] However, the phrase neglects to address all of the work the YA authors put in after a first draft—when, as Henry says, it "becomes not just for me." It is this point after the first draft that the novel becomes for the YA authors' audience, not for themselves.

Writing for the 16 year-old-self, while perhaps very true for these authors, is a feminized phrase that pushes their ambitions as published authors to the side in order to appease critics. The phrase downplays the YA authors' career ambitions and places less social weight on a genre they enjoy to read and to write. Recall the criticism of Victoria Aveyard as too ambitious from chapter two: Aveyard's ambition to have *Red Queen* be the "next big YA novel" was seen as inappropriate by an anonymous author on Tumblr—too ambitious and in it for the "wrong" reasons.[150] Claiming to write for the 16 year-old-self gives YA authors a safe answer that outside adults and literary critics can digest that is devoid of the ambition present in Aveyard's statement. To critics, the phrase appears to explain why the authors chose to write YA in the first place—a feminized, disparaged genre—because they are connecting to their teenage selves rather than valuing current teenagers, which is not true. Moreover, the expression contradicts the idea that YA authors should not "[prioritize their] own money, fame, and movie deal over stories for

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[149] Holly Black, Twitter post, December 16, 2015, 2:43 p.m., https://twitter.com/hollyblack/status/677227555640971264.

[150] Victoria Aveyard, "Victoria Aveyard," Tumblr, March 5, 2016, http://victoriaaveyard.com/post/140534583155/support-and-representation.

teens" because they claim to think about themselves instead.[151] However, as Henry and Schwab show, YA authors do think of their audience and that is what separates them from other writers. Ultimately, this assertion's use can change depending on the context, but is rooted in a truth for these YA authors and who their audience is when writing.

After a first draft, the audience might factor in to the subsequent edits of the manuscript; when that shifting point occurs, and the degree of it, is specific to each individual author. For example, Heidi Heilig seems to have her audience in mind while writing when she tweets, "UGH JUST GOT AN IDEA AND NOT SURE IF IT"S GOOD OR NOT"[152] and later follows up this tweet with, "The 'good idea' of earlier is blatant fan service. still maybe good. but pretty blatant."[153] Here, Heilig wonders whether she should write something because her audience will enjoy it. Does that mean it should be in her book? The motherly role many YA authors assume or accept on social media from their readers would suggest an outpouring of morality lessons and "clean YA."[154] Being a mother or motherly carries certain connotations as discussed in chapter two, and YA authors are expected to interact with readers with nurturance, sensitivity, and emotion. However, should authors do what is best for the story or what is "best" for their audience? Should authors write what their audience wants them to write or what they want? Should authors take both what is best for the story *and* audience into account?

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[151] Ibid.

[152] Heidi Heilig, Twitter post, February 14, 2016, 3:39 p.m., https://twitter.com/heidiheilig/status/698984958715654145.

[153] Heidi Heilig, Twitter post, February 14, 2016, 6:56 p.m., https://twitter.com/heidiheilig/status/699034508830572546.

[154] A moniker given to YA novels that "would earn a PG or PG-13 rating at the movies." Lauren Summerford, "What Does Clean YA Mean?" Blink YA Books, June 27, 2016, http://blinkyabooks.com/2016/06/clean-ya-mean/.

As discussed in chapter two, the tension between YA authors and Bloggers influences what Bloggers write in reviews and whether they post negative ones. While YA authors write for themselves *and* an audience, there is a fine line with what might influence the actual content of a novel:

> **Gratton**: The way that reader feedback affects my work is by reminding me that it does matter that I'm telling the stories I'm telling. On rough days when I think I'll never publish again, I have a folder of emails from readers who've told me my book made them remember something that helped them get up in the morning or they saw themselves in my most raw, furious character, or my book made them happy when they were dealing with depression. THAT keeps me going when I want to stop trying so hard and give into bitterness.
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> **Henry**: I think that the biggest thing that will probably happen, as far as influence after publication, is when I see the things people loved in my books. It's going to help me know what I'm good at. It's going to help me see what I should be pursing and what people connected with and how to give that to them…. I'll probably be more influenced by the positive than the negative just because it can be hard to know when the negative is a subjective thing or an objective thing.

Both Gratton and Henry assert that positive feedback is what keeps them writing. For Gratton these are Readers' personal emails to her about her books, and Henry anticipates that the same would influence her writing. What is clear based on Gratton and Henry's answers are that YA authors—among others—read all kinds of feedback they get from readers even while trying to ignore the internet. It makes sense that a creator would want to know the audience's reception, but both authors show that positive feedback keeps them going. Where Readers might reach out to authors because their book connected with them, the author connects with these responses—the personal emails from readers help Gratton just as much as readers say her book helped them.

Positive feedback has a higher chance of influencing authors because of its encouraging nature. Negative feedback might be met with more of a defensive response from authors simply

because of the highly personal connection they have with their novel. There are two potential ways to deal with negative criticism from readers:

> **Schwab**: It's not like I get feedback from readers about a character and so I decide not to kill that character or not, you know, to do something differently…. I'm definitely interested in what appeals to people and what doesn't and I carry that forward, but I've never had someone be like, "I love this character and I think you should do x, y, and z with them," and I think, "Oh that's a great idea" and I go and do x, y, and z with them. That's not how feedback works for me.
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> **Cavallaro**: If [readers] said, "We are not going to read books two and three" because of [no romance between the main characters] and I got thousands and thousands of responses… I would think, "Maybe I am doing something really wrong." …. [If] people… were like, "These characters seem like they want to be together and you're just keeping them apart for plot reasons." I would be like, "Oh. Really? I'm gonna reread this, I'm gonna to talk to my editor, I'm going to think about it." I guess that would influence it. If it was like *overwhelmingly* the response.

Schwab shows one side of authors that enjoys hearing the feedback from readers about what works and what might not, but that does not impact what she has planned for the book. Cavallaro feels similarly, but does admit that she would change a few things in her manuscript if the received a strong response from readers regarding a specific outcome that she as an author was not meeting. Heidi Heilig offers another caveat to listening to negative feedback:

> **Heilig**: [If] someone said, "Oh, this story is racist" or "They better not do this or else that would be really an insult to…" Or, "I hope the story doesn't end this way…" …And my story ended that way? I might try to change it, but only.… if it became clear to me that it was a huge insult to someone on a racial level or… Some kind of marginalization level. 'Cause that stuff that's important to me, really. [If] someone was like, "Oh, I don't like love triangles" and I have a love triangle I'd be like, "Yeah, screw it, I don't care." (laughs)…. Because there's nothing I can do.… By the time the book's so far along, unless it was something that was really important to change… It would be really hard to change.

Both Cavallaro and Heilig say they would adjust content in their books if there were a problematic aspect. Their answers demonstrate a spectrum of problems that readers could have

with a novel, from the plot to portrayals of characters. Like Heilig says, changing problematic aspects according to race and other intersections of identity is something she would do, but changing a love triangle, which is more plot-based, would not happen. These potential comments from readers apply to Henry's assertion that it is often difficult to know whether a comment is subjective or objective. For these YA authors, finding issue with a love triangle is not the same as calling out a racist character or trope: one of these appears as more subjective to a reader (love triangle), while the other (racist character) deals more with the novel as a form of media and what it communicates to readers on a larger level. Even though the authors claim not to always fully know what kind of feedback they would actually listen to, at some level they do listen to all of it.

However, focusing on the positive makes sense for creators who could easily become frustrated by the negative. This logic applies to any type of creator: constant attention on the negative, whatever it may be, has the ability to paralyze someone creatively:

> **Emily Henry**: [Realizing] that people are connecting with the friendship I'm writing definitely makes me think like, "Oh, well should I be writing books that are more centered around a friendship? Is this what I should focus on next?"…. I'm sure there will be times where I see negative reactions and I feel it in my gut immediately that this person is right and that I agree with them. I'm sure that will also influence my writing, too. But that's one reason that I shut down from social media while I'm drafting because it can be very paralyzing to be thinking about all of the things that you know you've done wrong in the past or messed up with.

Again, Henry demonstrates that the YA authors would make changes to their writing based on audience feedback. Initially, one must wonder whether paying attention to mostly positive feedback actually helps authors grow and develop their writing or merely boosts their ego; however, it does seem based on the YA authors' answers that they take the positive comments

seriously and want to continue to improve on those themes or concepts in their writing. It is a complex relationship between the authors listening to themselves and the story they are telling and what the audience says and whether that feedback strikes a cord with them to amass changes. Henry expresses, "But we know that not every book is for every person. There isn't a book that would be that…. I mean, that would just end up so bland and oatmeal if you tried to write a book that everyone was okay with and everyone liked." Her comment suggests that the YA authors successfully decipher which comments from readers are applicable to use for changes and which ones are not, whether they are positive or negative.

Ultimately, even when the authors say they write for their 16 year-old-selves, they *are* thinking of the audience—an audience that may be young female teenagers like their past selves. Enhancing themes that readers like, such as friendship, or maintaining a character's personality because readers like it is still an instance of audience influence, despite the YA authors writing for themselves. These themes may also be what YA authors wish they had read more of when they were younger. Of course, it is important to remember that these YA authors work in the commercial business that is publishing. If YA authors did not have readers consuming their books, they would most likely not be able to publish more—so listening to readers, to a point, is extremely important.

Social Responsibility

As YA authors are encouraged to be online and they read the feedback they get from readers, these authors have visibly increased their sense of social responsibility for their readers. A turning point in conversations between YA authors, agents, and editors occurred in 2014 when authors Ellen Oh and Malinda Lo had a conversation on Twitter that turned into a non-profit

organization called, We Need Diverse Books (WNDB). The organization's mission is to "[put] more books featuring diverse characters into the hands of all children" with the ultimate goal of all children seeing themselves in books.[155] While conversations of representation occurred before the creation of the non-profit, WNDB's creation opened up conversations about "sensitivity readers," or beta readers who read a "manuscript for issues of representation and for instances of bias on the page,"[156] and #OwnVoices, a Twitter hashtag that "focuses on recommending titles about marginalized groups of people by authors in those groups."[157]

As a genre, YA literature has a history of scholars and librarians emphasizing it as a powerful medium that readers can use to understand their emotions in a new way after reading a book—readers might understand their own emotions in a new way.[158] For example, scholar Janet Alsup encourages studying the gap between the reader's life and the world in the novel and thinks that books can help a teen think about larger socio-cultural contexts like racism, sexism, and homophobia.[159] Ethics in YA literature are a constant topic of conversation amongst librarians, teachers, authors, and parents—the sexual content of YA novels a subject that takes particular precedence. Many librarians take it upon themselves to try and define YA literature,

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[155] "Mission Statement," We Need Diverse Books, accessed June 30, 2016, http://weneeddiversebooks.org/mission-statement/.

[156] "Sensitivity Readers," Writing in the Margins, accessed June 30, 2016, http://writeinthemargins.org/sensitivity-readers/.

[157] Nicole Brinkley, "#OwnVoices takes over Twitter," YA Interrobang, September 11, 2015, http://www.yainterrobang.com/ownvoices/.

[158] Janet Alsup, *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity Across Cultures and Classrooms* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 4.

[159] Ibid, 13.

both to help teenage readers and keep certain content out of the hands of younger readers.[160] Much of the scholarly work done by psychologists and librarians about YA literature concerns itself with identities and the construction of those identities. WNDB and #OwnVoices branch off of these works, as they too highlight identities and encourage the inclusion of more diverse identities in YA literature.

Conversations about representation certainly existed before WNDB's creation; however, the non-profit gained momentum that continues online. The push for sensitivity readers is a step toward representation of different, intersectionally-identified characters. Sensitivity readers identify with one or more culturally marginalized communities. These readers can be hired through sites like "Writing in the Margins: Helping Underrepresented Stories Find Their Place," for a recommended minimum of $250. The site also provides a database spreadsheet of potential sensitivity readers, their qualifications, areas of expertise, and rates.[161] Another way for authors to find sensitivity readers is to inquire on Twitter and hope followers will boost their request. Publishing houses and editors do not require sensitivity readers, rather the YA community of authors and Bloggers continue to emphasize the importance of hiring them when writing outside ones' experience. The advocacy for sensitivity readers hinges on the same feminized characteristics that YA authors use with readers: nurturance, *sensitivity*, and emotion. Where these qualities might be seen as weak in the face of more masculinized traits, YA authors use their femininity as power to enact change within YA literature. They acknowledge social and cultural differences in respectful ways, which other industries like television and film also try to

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[160] Karen Coats, "Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory," in *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Shelby A. Wolf, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 315.

[161] "Sensitivity Readers," Writing in the Margins.

do; however, YA literature is a uniquely female-dominated space that gets dismissed by other literary genres. Nonetheless, YA literature is able to instill real changes—albeit sometimes *small* changes—and propose measures such as sensitivity readers to improve the quality of their media.

The word "sensitivity" in sensitivity reader refers to the potentially sensitive nature of what the betas might read—the content could be upsetting or offensive to them for a number of reasons. Similarly, "sensitivity" could refer back to the authors who are thinking of their audiences' emotional reactions to their work—the act of hiring a sensitivity reader shows the author's own personal sensitivity in action. While getting her second book read by sensitivity readers, YA author Becky Albertalli wrote on Twitter about the process:

> In particular, I keep coming back to what a huge gift these readers are giving me. It is NOT easy to give this kind of feedback./Which is why I think we authors have a huge responsibility to take this feedback seriously. It doesn't mean we have to accept every change-/-but it's so critically important to listen, especially when we're coming from a place of privilege. … Fellow privileged writers, please, please listen to your sensitivity readers without defensiveness. They're doing you a huge favor.[162]

She points out the responsibility that authors have to their sensitivity readers, but this notion carries over to their other readers as well. Albertalli urges her other privileged writers to listen to the feedback they receive, a request that highlights the way in which hiring a sensitivity reader might not show that an author is sensitive.

As previously mentioned, hiring a sensitivity reader might mean that authors have a lot of empathy for their readers—they want to portray their characters with identities other than their own respectfully. However, the action could mean that authors lack this empathy at all, especially if they do not listen to the feedback from sensitivity readers, as Albertalli criticizes

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[162] Becky Albertalli, Twitter post, February 21, 2016, 12:24 p.m., https://twitter.com/beckyalbertalli/status/701472515550482432.

—"If you ignore the feedback, it doesn't count as being vetted."[163] Expecting women and men of color, LGBTQIA people, and other identities to read and explain why a portrayal might be offensive or inappropriate—without authors doing their own part with research—comes from an insensitive place. Putting these sensitivity readers through harrowing representations without having done research into a particular identity position puts those readers at risk. Authors might want their book read by a sensitivity reader simply so they can say it was "vetted," as Albertalli says, rather than out of a genuine desire to engage in responsible representation.

Yet, if these authors only want a sticker of approval and they ignore criticism, they are the ones who put sensitivity readers at risk. In theory, an author who hires a sensitivity reader is attune to social and cultural climates, but it is not always the case. YA author Sangu Mandanna explains, "There's a huge [difference] between a story set in India about a white student experiencing the culture, say, and a story about/an Indian from his/her POV written by a white author. One is diverse while also hopefully respectful, the other could co-opt our voices."[164] What is clear from discussions of sensitivity readers is that YA authors do listen to their audience and care about what readers say, but whether they incorporate any of those changes into a book is up to them.

The push for #OwnVoices novels also works with sensitivity and empathy. A privileged author recommending or "boosting" the work of an #OwnVoices author might help that less privileged author's career, especially if they are new—it is a nurturing act, but in a respectful way that highlights that person's work rather than turning the focus back to the privileged author.

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[163] Ibid.

[164] Sangu Mandanna, Twitter post, February 18, 2016, 10:37 a.m., https://twitter.com/SanguMandanna/status/700358518134673410.

Of course, many YA authors have different intersectional identities with different degrees of privilege, but they all can boost one another's work. For example, Marieke Nijkamp, YA author of *This Is Where It Ends,* boosted an #OwnVoices novel that meant something to her: "#OwnVoices @malindalo's ASH, a queer retelling of Cinderella, was one of the first stories to tell me fairy tales were for queer people too."[165] Similarly, Malinda Lo, the author of *Ash*, boosted a graphic novel: "Just out last week: HONOR GIRL by @maggiethrash, a lovely graphic memoir about discovering your sexual identity at summer camp #ownvoices."[166] Certainly, #OwnVoices is not for more privileged authors to tout that privilege, but for authors from all different intersections to nurture one another's work and provide emotional testimonies, like Nijkamp says of *Ash*. They use social media to connect readers and to promote empathy and inclusivity for one another; the goal is to create better media.

While YA authors do not necessarily need to incorporate the positive or negative feedback from sensitivity readers, their regular readers, or other authors, the increase of LGBT YA novels suggests that they are listening. In addition to writing books and working with WNDB, Malinda Lo researches the number of LGBT YA novels that get published every year. According to Lo, in 2013 there were 94 YA novels published that featured an LGBT character or theme—29 from mainstream publishers like Penguin Random House and the other 65 from LGBT publishers.[167] From 2012 to 2013 there was a 70 percent increase of the number of LGBT

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[165] Marieke Nijkamp, Twitter post, September 6, 2015, 1:53 p.m., https://twitter.com/mariekeyn/status/640598704886575104?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw.

[166] Malinda Lo, Twitter post, September 7, 2015, 9:28 a.m., https://twitter.com/malindalo/status/640894394946723840?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw.

[167] Malinda Lo, "2013 LGBT YA by the Numbers," Tumblr, October 7, 2013, http://www.malindalo.com/2013/10/2013-lgbt-ya-by-the-numbers/.

YA novels. In the next year's report, Lo found that 47 LGBT YA novels were published by mainstream publishing houses, which was a 59 percent increase over 2013.[168]

A Goodreads list compiles "2015 YA Books with LGBT Themes," a list with a total of 194 novels on it. For 2016, a Barnes and Noble blog post previews "15 of Our Most Anticipated LGBTQ YAs of 2016," Nijkamp's among the list.[169] Increasingly, big name authors like Rainbow Rowell, Leigh Bardugo, and Victoria Aveyard include LGBT characters in their novels,[170] which continues to show authors listening not only to themselves and what they want to write, but to their audience as well. Clearly, YA authors shift to writing for their audience, but many also develop a social responsibility from the conversations about representation on social media. This social responsibility manifests itself as YA authors trying to nurture one another and instill empathy in one another as they tell stories.

However, it is YA authors' distinctly feminine attitude and empathy that creates real change in YA literature. These YA authors drain their own emotions both in conversations of representation and in their writing. They work toward inclusivity and intersectionality so their readers do not have to feel the same drain while reading. Truly, YA authors put work into their novels and their community to make them better, and their embrace of feminized traits—despite being ridiculed by people inside and outside the YA literature community—helps make that change possible. While the road to change might be messy and imperfect, other cultural producers can learn from YA authors to make change in their own industries.

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[168] Malinda Lo, "2014 LGBT YA by the Numbers," Tumblr, December 10, 2014, http://www.malindalo.com/2014/12/2014-lgbt-ya-by-the-numbers/.

[169] Dahlia Adler, "15 of Our Most Anticipated LGBTQ YAs of 2016," Barnes & Noble, December 18, 2015, http://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/teen/15-of-our-most-anticipated-lgbtq-yas-of-2016/.

[170] *Carry On*, *Six of Crows*, and *Queen Song* (novella) respectively for these three authors.

Conclusion

YA authors use social media as part of their new work practice, using it to engage with readers and industry colleagues. They try to strike a balance between writing and social media use, which can be difficult when websites like Tumblr or Twitter ask for constant engagement. As they add social media into their daily work routines, YA authors must be careful not to affect the business side of their career negatively. One tweet about a potential book deal could stop the deal in its tracks. However, in general, YA authors are encouraged to express themselves in a genuine way and as a result they do the same kind of emotional work that they do with readers. Websites like Twitter have become part of YA authors' work practice where they should assume appropriate femininity, being kind and positive to all they encounter. They should be the "correct" feminine versions of themselves as they network and talk with fans. Failing to uphold certain niceties could mean losing readers and turning off potential industry peers. Social media boxes YA authors in to conventions of femininity that can have real effects on their careers.

These interactions with readers online have the potential to influence the content of YA authors' novels. Social media brings more voices to weigh in on a YA author's book and many authors try to keep new projects as secretive as possible—talking too much about a project could invite too much outside input. While working on a first draft, many YA authors claim they write for their 16 year-old-selves rather than an audience. This assertion might be true for YA authors, but it can act as a defense to literary critics who might disparage YA literature. Furthermore, the phrase is not entirely true because positive interactions, such as reviews from readers, can shape what an author might write next. For YA authors, hearing what they do well in a novel signals that they should recreate something similar in the future, whether it be a friendship or type of

character. Listening to readers occurs when a YA author knows a decision is best for both the book and audience.

YA authors listen in different capacities on social media and have increased their social responsibility. Organizations like We Need Diverse Books spark conversations about intersectional representation in YA literature and children's books. Similarly, the hashtag #OwnVoices encourages all YA authors to boost other voices to make YA literature more inclusive. Emphasis gets put on privileged authors to boost #OwnVoices novels and also to consider hiring sensitivity readers, a type of beta reader who reads a manuscript to check for "sensitive" material, or lack thereof. "Sensitive" refers to potentially harmful content, but also to the way in which YA authors try to be sensitive and empathetic to their readers. The presence of sensitivity readers as well as the steady rise of LGBT YA novels shows that YA authors listen to each other as well as to their readers. Authors these feminized traits to their advantage as they advocate for better representation in the media they help produce. YA literature is an industry dominated by women who use their femininity in order to advocate and to enact change.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This research project explores the impact of social media on YA authors and the influential, yet gendered, relationship they have with their audience of readers. I collected social media posts of YA authors talking to readers in order to analyze these interactions and their gendered nature. My interviews with five YA authors contribute to my analysis of gender, but also to the focus on cultural production and the influence of readers on the content of YA authors' novels. I argue that YA authors are expected to embody feminized traits on social media when speaking with readers and industry colleagues, but it is these same traits that they use to create social change in YA literature as a genre and an industry.

My chapters inspect YA authors' various relationships within the industry of YA literature. The manner in which YA authors talk to readers mimics the same language they use to speak with one another. YA authors speak to Readers, Reader-Creators, and Bloggers with feminized traits that these readers desire. In their quest to be "genuine" online with all they interact, YA authors often assume an appropriate type of femininity—one that encourages kindness and nurturance. As shown in chapter two, when YA authors do not successfully embody these qualities, readers react with backlash and not-so-subtly encourage YA authors to self-police themselves on social media. Similar criticism could result from industry personnel if a YA author does not uphold a specific positive-focused branding, then their career could be at risk. It is this same emphasized femininity that YA authors use as part of their social responsibility to their readers, to themselves, and to the industry.

Empathy and sensitivity become tools used to change the state of representation of intersectionally-diverse characters and authors in YA literature. Constant presence on social

media makes many YA authors aware of organizations like We Need Diverse books as well as movements like #OwnVoices. These movements offer more privileged YA authors a chance to learn and do their own research as they boost the voices and novels by more diverse YA authors. These social movements are not the only factors that might influence YA authors' novels—their daily interactions with readers do, too. When YA authors receive positive feedback from readers they are more likely to repeat the concept readers enjoyed, whether it be a friendship or a romance. Initially, YA authors might write their first draft with a younger version of themselves in mind, but as it progresses toward publication, the authors think more about the audience. Social responsibility as well as taking the audience into account after a first draft both hinge upon empathy. Listening to other people and considering how they live and experience their lives is a skill YA authors need in order to tell their characters' stories, too.

Limitations and Future Research

This research project has focused a lot on gender's influence on YA authors' interactions on social media. I look at femininity, but there is also room to analyze masculinity. What is the discourse surrounding male YA authors in the YA literature community? A comparison between critical acclaim about male and female YA authors could be done with a focus on gender inequality. Are male YA authors seen as more legitimate than female YA authors? What kind of standards are male YA authors held to by the community? What are conversations about masculinity like in the YA literature community? Does masculinity or femininity take precedence in these discussions? Even though women dominate YA literature and it is a highly feminine space, masculinity purveys culturally.

In addition to gender, other intersectional factors such as race, sexuality, disability, etc. impact YA authors' online experiences and interactions as well. These intersections add depth to the analysis and Future research might consider a focused project on the intersection of gender and race of YA authors. A particular focus could be the inception and reception to movements like #OwnVoices. My research was limited by which YA authors responded to my inquiry as well as gatekeepers for YA authors like their agents, who have their client's time management in mind. Future research could try to conduct interviews with a more diverse set of YA authors—given their availability—and they could be asked about their experiences. However, YA authors might not be inclined to discuss certain topics that they fear would impact their careers, such as discussing publishing houses. YA authors might be hesitant to discuss negative interactions with readers, both online and off, because they might come off as ungrateful to their other readers. Protecting their branding is in YA authors' self interest for their careers.

During this research, I primarily used interactions from Twitter and Tumblr because YA authors and readers are most active on these sites. Social media platforms like Facebook or Pinterest offer different types of interactions between YA authors and readers, though many posts are shared across platforms. Future research might consider why Twitter and Tumblr are preferred platforms for cultural producers like YA authors. Do creators use specific social media sites because their audience does? Do they choose a website to use merely because of its efficiency? What might deter creators from using specific websites? Do creators use certain websites for their public personas whereas other sites are used privately?

Moreover, I only interviewed YA authors and relied on social media posts from readers in order to analyze them; however, both of these resources are good places to start because their

activity is the core of the YA community. Readers, Reader-Creators, and Bloggers could all be interviewed about their practices and what they expect out of their interactions with YA authors. Furthermore, these types of readers could be separated into teenagers and adults, both of which would have different perspectives. As the perceived audience for YA literature, teenage readers would have very different expectations than adult YA readers who enjoy the genre. Of course, interviews come with limitations such as the number of people interviewed. A handful of readers or YA authors interviewed does not speak for all of them, but instead gives researchers a snapshot of trends that might occur on a larger scale.

In the same vein, readers' interactions with each other is another site that future research could consider. How do fans talk to one another? What do they value in YA literature? How do readers' own personal intersections impact their reactions to YA literature? What do they create and share with one another? What drives them to create something new from the original text? These questions would add more to the readers' side of the conversation: what they want out of their interactions with YA authors. While Henry Jenkins has done work on fan work, teenage fan culture could be explored rather than adult. A focus on YA literature and reader fan practices would open a discussion about youth and how they use the internet today. Moreover, research could connect the current trends for teenage fans to those for adults and look at how teenagers update or repeat certain fan practices.

Another area that could be explored is the publishing industry and its involvement in creating more inclusive media. Industry publications could be analyzed, like *Publisher's Weekly*, to see a potential pattern in the sales of YA novels. The marketing budgets for certain novels could be investigated to see which titles by what kind of YA authors get the most promotion.

What books continuously get picked up by big publishing houses and which ones do not? Do publishing houses tend to sign white YA authors who write about diverse characters? Does the publishing industry support more intersectional media? What restrictions have YA authors or agents come across as they try to sell to publishing houses? These questions are good to consider because while many YA authors support diverse YA literature, institutional factors may be working against them. YA authors do not exist and work in a vacuum. Institutions like publishing have power over their authors and a hierarchy of whiteness disseminates from this power. This issue repeats itself in different areas of culture, which makes it worth exploring in the context of YA literature.

Future research may also consider other creative industries such as television and film and the way in which audiences might influence content. How are these other creative industries gendered? How does social media impact the creators and their work? Are there instances of audience influence and if so what was the reception from them after the publication of a creative work? When there are book to movie adaptations like there are with YA literature, how much of what the audience wants is taken into account? How does the relationship between creators and their audience change when media products are crowd-funded through websites like Kickstarter?

These are all just some questions and considerations for other researchers to think about in order to build upon my research. I clearly show that YA literature connects to bigger cultural institutions and questions. Even when the YA literature community defies cultural norms, especially when it comes to femininity, it can repeat them in different ways that might not be immediately obvious. While some of my methods may have had limitations, I lay a foundation for more inquiry into the world of YA literature, its authors, and its readers.

Cultural Implications

Women dominate the genre that is young adult literature. Girls star as protagonists in the novels and women write their stories. Sexism occurs in this section of the publishing industry, despite women being the majority of YA authors. YA literature, too, struggles to legitimize itself in the literary community because of its feminized nature and the disparagement that follows the feminine and popular. While YA literature oftentimes embraces its femininity, it is not immune from strong cultural ideologies about what femininity means for women. This research exposes the ways even feminine work spaces internalize patriarchal culture. The expectations for YA authors on social media mimics the expectations of women culturally.

Online, readers want YA authors to engage with feminized traits like nurturance and kindness, where the authors act like mothers to them. The publishing industry itself—made up of agents, editors, and other authors—encourages YA authors to be "genuine," and to present themselves the best—read feminine—way possible. The notion that women must only be one type of femininity that appeases others limits all women, not just YA authors. My research reveals the internalization of these expectations of femininity in the YA literature community and the effect that they have on YA authors' interactions and work practices. YA authors do not need to enforce feminized traits like kindness when, culturally, they have been taught to assume these qualities—regardless of an industry and their place in it. While YA literature is part of one specific industry, it shows the power of dominant ideology in action and its impact in it.

Understanding expectations of femininity in YA literature helps us identify the degree of internalization, but also how YA authors use their femininity within the industry. Insisting on certain feminized qualities puts restrictions on YA authors' identities and does not allow for true

expression of themselves on social media. Of course, without impositions of femininity, YA authors may still engage with one another and readers in the same feminized manner; however, there is a difference between being oneself and being a version of oneself. This is not to suggest that YA authors should be cruel to readers or others on social media, but rather that they should not be forced to embody one specific type of femininity. This emphasis reveals how embedded these cultural assumptions of femininity are and how difficult it is to change them.

Social media amplifies the connection creators have with their audience. It also adds a lot of emotional work for YA authors to complete for their readers. YA authors struggle to balance their writing as well as their online personas, which have become part of their work. This trend speaks to the way in which branding has become essential to many creators' work. As social media grows more prominent to have and to use, the balance that YA authors try to find between work and social media continues to blur. Portraying a version of themselves on social media is part of YA authors' new work practice; however, it also continues to perpetuate these standards of femininity. What is considered "genuine" about someone's persona on social media might fluctuate, but YA authors' branding engrains itself in the same expectations of femininity. Being nurturing on social media will get a YA author further than being neglectful, which connects to readers who sometimes call them "mom."

Trying to fulfill these "genuine" expectations at every moment is more emotional work for YA authors. As previously mentioned, they do this same emotional work with their readers on social media. This relationship between YA authors and readers is two-fold—YA authors need the readers in order to have a career and the readers need the YA authors so they have media to consume. This relationship is true of other creative industries, such as film—filmmakers need

their audience and the audience needs the filmmakers. Creators strike a balance between independent creation and dependence on their audience. As my research shows, YA authors consider their audience after the initial first draft of a novel. They try to do what is best for both their book and their audience, which is the balance in question. Other creators of popular media most likely do the same as they attempt to make successful media.

The constant interaction between creators and their audience on social media has the potential to influence the creators' content. Creation might seem like a solitary action, which is a concept that the YA authors purport when they say they write for their 16-year-old-selves. However, the YA authors consider their audience as soon as their first draft is finished. While they might write a novel for themselves at first, there is a desire to make a media product that resonates with an audience. It is because of this desire that the audience has the potential to influence the content, but in varying degrees. Positive feedback influences YA authors, which reiterates the two-fold relationship they have with their readers. The positive tells YA authors what they have done well and what they should repeat in the future. It boosts YA authors' confidence enough so they continue to create for themselves and their audience. Continuing this relationship with the audience is in creators' best interest and benefits both parties in question.

Creators feel an obligation to their audience in different capacities, but YA authors in particular have increased their social responsibility toward readers. They blend respectful portrayals of diverse characters in with plots they want to write and their audiences want to read. While other industries might try to start movements like We Need Diverse Books, YA authors already have. They hold one another accountable for the media they create and push for better creations in the future. Other industries could take note of the care many YA authors put into

making a standard for their genre that is inclusive and diverse. In this way, YA authors take back their femininity in order to foster and demand empathy for one another and their readers who deserve to see characters like themselves.

This thesis illuminates questions of cultural production and its link to gender. Masculinity dominates many industries, but as a genre steeped in femininity, YA literature offers a different perspective in which to think about the creation of media texts and interactions with the audience in this social media age. The cultural production of books inevitably takes the audience into consideration, and the manner in which a YA author engages with it speaks to gender. Putting the audience first reflects culture's perception that a mother should put her child first. Many YA authors internalize cultural expectations of femininity and unconsciously participate in efforts to uphold them, which speaks to the immense power of structures like patriarchy. However, using femininity to enact social change is distinct to the YA literature community and challenges conceptualizations of the feminine as weak. Despite disparagement from critics inside and outside of the genre, YA literature and its authors continue to gain readers, to catch the eye of Hollywood producers, and to advocate for better, inclusive media. The YA literature community showcases femininity's power, its resilience, and its potential in the future shaping of media industries.

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